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# The Return of the Black Lord

*The African Origins of the Sacred Grail*

by

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## **Dedication**

*For my Beloved Friends,*

*Rea Roxas (2000–2013)*

*& Her Father*

*Crisryan Roxas (1962–2013)*

*“Meeting you both has made me a better person.*

*I am eternally grateful to have had you in my life.”*

*– Nenad M. Djurdjevic*

## **Acknowledgments**

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, an enlightened scholar: who continually conveyed a spirit of utmost generosity in regard to research and an excitement to teaching. Without her guidance and persistent help this research paper would not have been possible.

I would like to thank my research colleague Sidney Davis, for the shared information and his work concerning African sacred sciences, and whose enthusiasm for my research conclusions motivated me to pursue the path less traveled by academia, a path that has become the greatest adventure of my life.

I also would like to express my gratitude to the CARC (Catherine Acholonu Research Center), dedicated to the research and study of African cultural studies, for accepting my contribution to comparative cultural studies into African pre-history and African culture.

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## Introduction

Catherine Acholonu and Nenad Djurdjevic were kindred spirits and close collaborators on the subjects of these pages and on the other aspects of our research. As a joint fellow of the Catherine Acholonu Research Center for African Sciences, I was requested to write these introductory remarks to this work, something that Professor Catherine intended to do and had been working on before her abrupt transition to our ancestors on March 18, 2014. Thus, I was thus asked to make this introduction to this work on her behalf and I am pleased and honored to do so.

Let me begin by borrowing or paraphrasing a statement from Author, African Researcher and Egyptologist Robert Bauval, that ~ it is no longer a theory, it is no longer an hypothesis, it is a fact; mankind evolved in Africa. Human origin is African so that it can be said without controversy, there is truly only one race, the African race. ~ And if such be the case (and I am factually convicted it is) would it not logically follow that human cognitive skills such as tool making, speech, language, art and writing has its source in Africa as well? And what of religion, spirituality, science, legend and myth? Would not all human ideations find their source and origin in Africa?

Barbara Morstates in “The Cosmic Mother,” “The only way for human beings to survive the end is to return to the beginning”.<sup>1</sup> We then might understand the underlying theme and context of “The Return of the Black Lord”. Within these pages we will have an introduction or perhaps a re-introduction for those of us who are already oriented to our research findings, to the legend of the Holy Grail. Could the legend of the Holy Grail go further back in time than our current history have us to believe? Has the hunt for the Holy Grail gone on just as long?

Catherine Acholonu postulated that the origin of world myths including that of The Grail myth can be found in the ancient paleolithic semiotics of the Ikom monoliths in Cross River State in South East Nigeria. She further indicated that The Grail myth had universal implications found in all myths of primitive cultures worldwide having to do with not only the past, but the present and future destiny of mankind. The myth has its origins far deep into paleolithic or stone age time. I believe the facts contained in this paper demonstrate not only that, but that the myth is explained, its significance expounded and the hunt has found its object, The Holy Grail itself. The evidence herein recommends itself to the research oriented, the spiritually minded and the objective critical examiner.

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<sup>1</sup> Sjo M. and Mor B. (1997) *The Great Cosmic Mother, Rediscovering the Religion of the Earth*, p. 415

When Dr. Catherine Acholonu and myself came upon the ancient Iron smelting site at Lejja, I marveled over the ubiquity of iron slag scattered everywhere for miles and that the people living, walking in and around these “rocks” and the children playing on them and with them for generations appeared oblivious to the fact that they were walking on and playing in, and around the earliest evidences of mankind's technology in iron metallurgy on the planet. They were and are walking on and playing in a forgotten past, tradition and history known only to a very few. Though the evidences and the signs are scattered widely and almost everywhere in the landscape, on and in the ground excavations, it meant little except to those who were historians, researchers and those who already knew or who were able to recognize the evidences of what we were looking at. So in many ways and similarly, it is with the subject at hand, and with the information presented in these pages you are invited to read.

As you read and consider the story of the The Holy Grail – the holy chalice of the Christ, understand through it the story of humanity, the story of love, the story of communion with the divine, the story of self sacrifice, the story of salvation that had always been known to the ancients and embodied in shrines, temples, symbol, legend and myth and revealed in art. *The Return of the Black Lord* is the story of resurrection, renewal, of a new beginning by returning to the beginning. It is a story of Africa generally and a story of the Igbo in particular. It is a revelation of the African renaissance. It is the awakened consciousness of the new age. Coming to us as it does through these pages proves that truth is no respecter of persons regardless of race, color, ethnicity or national origin. “We are One” is not just a new age platitude, it is a universal divine fact proven even in our human DNA.

This is a work that speaks the language of the universe. This work as all our continuing efforts going forward is actuated and inspired by the same spirit that animated our friend, colleague, partner and fellow researcher professor Catherine Acholonu. As such this work's research findings seeks to bring humanity back to the basics, to recapture the true essence of things, the truth that has been lost, that has been hidden and the knowledge that has been in modern time been subverted by the monologue of Global North hegemony of Westocentrism, Ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism and its attendant politics of white supremacy and supporting ideologies and doctrines of “the book” religions.

Catherine stated, “For centuries, the nations and peoples of the South, the Third World have been treated as the silent, female partners of the West in international relations, to be seen but never heard. Their ageless philosophies and the best practices that created the classical civilizations of yesteryears, have along with their art, cultures and traditions, been bottled up in the museums of the West.

Their indigenous sciences have together with their new scientific endeavors, their emerging literatures, their old and knew knowledge been cut off from the global information traffic by those who make it their business to decide who gets heard and who does not”.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the voices of Africa and Africans have been silenced through slavery and colonization. The affects resulting from such a legacy and stigma continue to linger. I am pleased to state that the author of this work represents a voice that is in dialogue with its African Mother, its African origins. His voice states strongly and eloquently that the monologue of the past is over. He digs up in what has been bottled up and exposes what has been kept hidden and secret in the confines, the recesses, the cellars, the coffers, private collections, the attics, the archives, the safes, foreign museums and forgotten store rooms of the consumer, the exploiter, the enslaver, the colonizer, the subjugator and the demonizer of primitive indigenous cultures and its peoples, not the least that of Africans.

I want to say a special word to those who as myself have or have had a professional, religious or cultural orientation in Judaism. I first approached this research with reticence, trepidation and suspicion because as Jews we do not recognize or accept any part of a Christ or a Messiah revealed in the story of Jesus in the Christian Bible known as “The Gospel” or commonly referred to as the “New Testament.” Though we accept, as much as the history will allow us, Jesus as a Jew and a son of Israel, we have no understanding of him as “Messiah,” “Lord,” “Saviour,” or “God.” We ascribe to him no deity or divinity. You will find in these pages that the ‘Christ’ story in the “New Testament” is not unique. The story is as old as humanity itself. It is part and parcel of the ancient “Hamite” or Khemite myths and religion of Egypt (Mizraim) Canaan and much of the Bronze Age and Iron Age worlds, the same myths that the biblical god Yahweh hated and wanted to uproot from the land of Canaan and from the minds and culture of its indigenous people. It is revealed in the Hebrew Bible as gentile, heathen or pagan culture and religion of “abomination”. Regardless of how it is presented there, it is the same “Christ” story, legend, and myth revealed in the NT as the “gospel.” When understood this way, it is no wonder that Jews have never had any religious affinity for the “gospel,” its NT theology or its Christ. It is at its root and core the pagan belief of the African ancients, testified to as such even by the Christian Church Fathers.

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<sup>2</sup> *They Lived Before Adam: Pre-Historic Origins Of The Igbo, The Never-Been-Ruled* [The Igbo Since 1.6 Million B.C.] A C-Span Television Live Broadcast Lecture By Professor Catherine Acholonu  
The Harlem Book Fair, Schomburg Center For Research In Black Culture, New York, USA, 18Th July, 2009. Page 7 Volume 4, No. 1 of The Flora Nwapa Club Newsletter

My point is that regardless of ones religious orientation or system of belief, consider and perchance read these pages with an open mind, for its truths however found are only truths if they make sense to you. It begs no question. It merely presents the facts as they appear to the writer and provides the evidences with them for your critical examination and dispassionate consideration. If you believe that you already have a truth, your truth or “the” truth, then you must take the position as I do; that truth can afford to be fair, for it has nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Dr. Sidney Louis Davis, Jr.  
Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria  
December 25, 2014

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## The Excision of the Spiritual

Since before the beginning of modern Egyptology in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, but especially since then, the analytic, reductionistic, rationalistic, and materialistic bent of the sciences of archaeology, geology, mechanical engineering, electrodynamics, and ancient technology has been a major obstacle for a holistic and new-data-friendly evaluation of the phenomenon of pyramids worldwide and its place in human history. Most ancient spiritual and esoteric traditions have been ignored or repressed by generations of scholars. Even today, many thinkers are blinded by the assumption that “real” scientists or philosophers cannot be interested in spiritualism or magic, especially those scholars who have been indoctrinated into cultural materialism. They cannot imagine that the great heroes of Greek philosophy and science, such as Pythagoras, Empedocles, and Plato, who were seen as founders of the rationalist tradition, could have had any connection with “irrational” magic, alchemy, or “mystery-mongering”.<sup>1</sup> This bias has forced many thinkers and writers into contorted interpretations of existing historical and archaeological evidence.

Long before modern scientific thought came into existence, the awareness that consciousness can extend beyond the human body was extremely important among ancient cultures, since it was considered part of human personality that would likely, or at least possibly, survive death. For almost every advanced culture in the past, those fairly well known, as well those largely forgotten, the human soul, its survival after death, and the cycles of death and rebirth, played important roles in human life and deeply influenced the relationship of human beings to the world.<sup>2</sup> Most of these cultures independently developed a belief system in the immortality of the soul and consciousness. They came to share a common worldview: the awareness that consciousness permeates all of nature, all of biological life, and even “lifeless” objects, to one degree or another, and both their daily routines and their sacred structures were based on this idea. Modern science considers human beings to be merely highly developed thinking animals that one day, with absolutely surety, would perish forever. But the spiritual doctrines of the ancients related human beings to the very essence of divine, immortal stars (Lat. *scintilla stelaris essentiae*).<sup>3</sup>

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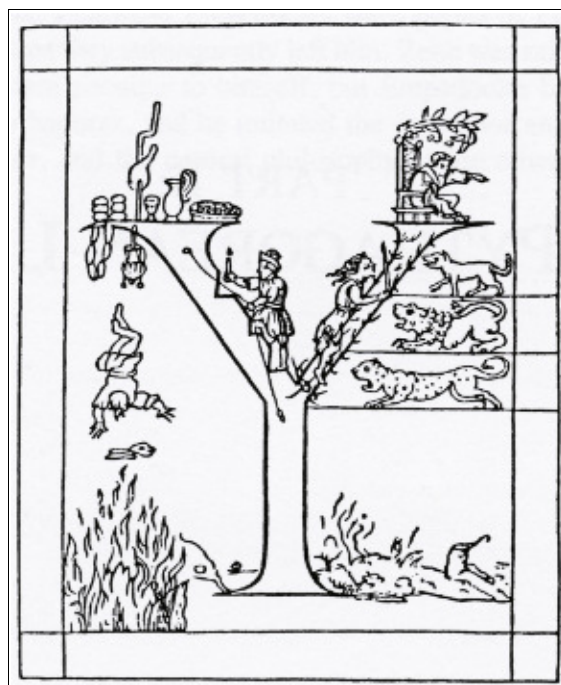
<sup>1</sup> Opsopaus J. (1997) A Review of Peter Kingsley's *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic* ;

Kingsley, P. (1995) *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition*.

<sup>2</sup> Grof, S. (1992) *The Holotropic Mind: The Three Levels of Human Consciousness and How They Shape Our Lives*.

<sup>3</sup> Roman philosopher and writer Macrobius (A.D. 400) on the *Somnium Scipionis*, I: 14, says: “Heraclitus declared that the soul is a spark of the essential substance of the stars.”

The ancient Greeks, who inherited their sacred knowledge from the Egyptians, explain in detail that at death the soul is separated from the body. Concurrently, the mind is separated from the soul, while the soul returns to the Moon. This spiritual process occurs in the Hidden Place of Hecate, who lives in a cave that is a mouth of the Underworld. This is the place of judgment, the meeting of Three Ways, represented by the uterus-shaped Pythagorean upsilion (Y).<sup>4</sup> Those who are not sufficiently enlightened at death pass through the Gate on the dark side of the Moon facing Earth and there await reincarnation.



Those who are sufficiently enlightened pass through the gate on the light side of the moon and arrive in the realm of the sun, and thereby escape the cycle of reincarnation. It is said that the higher mind can be mortal or immortal, depending on how it directs itself: upward or downward. According to the Pythagorean spiritual knowledge, by thinking the right thoughts, one can keep the higher mind from dissolution at death. The process of degradation of the human soul, however, may already take place during a person's lifetime. Depending on how we direct our thoughts, and the actions we perform, say the ancient Greeks, our mind, body and soul may perish or flourish.

The current world view held by science is that all that is measurable and verifiable through the scientific method is real, and that which cannot be measured with our, to us, technologically advanced instruments is simply opinion, belief, superstition or fantasy. Yet, what seems to emerge is that science has become a new religion where critical thinking and even the scientific method have been in many circumstances virtually eliminated from the field, being replaced by head-bobbing general consensus and cognitive dissonance among a professorial elite. Materialistic science is so severely secularized and divorced from its ancient roots in philosophy that much it directly opposes even the notion of any non-material causes or realities, including even the first cause of matter itself. The suppression of nonconformist scholarship that has gone against the materialistic world view, is much more widespread in the West than generally acknowledged.

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<sup>4</sup> L. Joost-Gaugier Ch. (2006) *Measuring Heaven: Pythagoras and His Influence on Thought and Art in Antiquity and the Middle Ages*

Historically speaking, materialistic science has served, wittingly or unwittingly, a ruthless colonialism responsible for injustices committed against weak peoples of the world. Its products are usually exploited in favor of the great world powers to consolidate their dominion over the world. Despite modern technological progress, “the richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually”.<sup>5</sup> Even if we leave out human values or the innate necessity for spiritual happiness, modern science based on philosophical, practical and scientific materialism has caused much harm to mankind.



**Image:** Antonio Canova, *Psyche revived by Cupid's kiss*; Musée du Louvre, Paris

The science without a soul, as we know it today was established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the rise of experimental psychology.<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of the 1800s “psychology” was still defined as a “Discourse or treatise of the human soul; the doctrine of the nature of and properties of the soul, and the powers in function of the soul...” and the soul (from Greek *psyche*) was defined as “An entity conceived as the essence, substance, or actuating (“impelling”) cause of individual life... it is the subject of the experience mediated by his body; it is not the mind, but that which thinks and wills. Second, the soul is identified with the totality of conscious experience”.<sup>7</sup> As mentioned above, the forced elimination of the soul and the application of materialistic corrective thinking coincides with the rise of experimental psychology in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when German psychologist Wilhelm Wundt officially rejected the existence of the soul by declaring – without a shred of evidence – that man was merely a product of genes. According to Wundt, the idea of a spirit being “a sensible being, separable from the body” was “scientifically” relegated to the delusive thinking of primitive races.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> King M.L. (1964) The Nobel Peace Prize Winner – *Acceptance speech held in the auditorium of the University of Oslo*.

<sup>6</sup> Wundt W. (1911) *Introduction to Psychology*, p. 192.

<sup>7</sup> Webster's Dictionary 1829–1892

<sup>8</sup> Wundt W. (1892) *Ethics: An Investigation of the Facts and Laws of the Moral Life*, p. 104.



With the soul eliminated, Wundt set about manipulating behavior and training individuals, much like one would an animal. As a consequence, many generations of modern scientists were indoctrinated into materialist thinking by Wundt's "psychology" of

*"Orthodoxy means not thinking,  
not needing to think.  
Orthodoxy is unconsciousness."*

– George Orwell (1984)

hypothetical brain-mechanics. Although Wundt's psychology, or better "cerebrology," is far from being a science, due its lack of empirical investigation, much of his pseudo-psychological theories and methods of reasoning have been integrated into many other fields of modern science, including, recursively, naturalistic materialism.<sup>9</sup> Following the Wundtian method of training the human intellect, the scientific orthodoxy is constantly attempting to recruit rationality to its cause. In this way, scientific rationalism has become a sort of ideological and cerebrological distortion of reality whereby scientism (i.e. scientific consensus) keeps thinkers on a tight leash of a dogmatic belief system that preaches the idea that we will never understand anything about the first cause of matter, the state of being, and the nature of consciousness.

Almost the entire mental edifice of the materialistic orthodoxy is based on the Wundtian idea that mental health depends upon an adjustment to the world rather than its conquest. It implies that man cannot effect positive change on the world around him but must submit to its random will. In other words, experimental cerebrology has been designed to dominate free will by turning human beings into sheep. It's not a coincidence that theories like "free will is an illusion" were specifically designed to switch off the human mind and rule out any possibility of humans having a soul.

These theories postulate that nebulous group-think is nature's replacement for focused, independent thought. Instead of learning to discern truth on your own and to trust your personal experience, you're told that you should accept from others what to believe, since you have no choice, and to swallow any kind of nonsense coming from the materialistic orthodoxy. Such a system operates by eroding your trust in your own intellect, experience, consciousness and soul, gradually convincing you to put trust into others' ideas, no matter how much those ideas conflict with obvious reality. Never yet has turning off one's consciousness and practicing mindless science brought anyone closer to the truth.

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<sup>9</sup> Lothstein L.M. (2003) *The Transformation of Psychology: Influences of 19th-Century Philosophy, Technology, and Natural Science*

Although reductionistic science keeps telling that we are meaningless products of blind chemical forces <sup>10</sup>, leading meaningless lives, and that consciousness as an exclusive product of the brain will cease to exist with physical death, the realm of reality goes farther than a mind limited by ideology can conceive. While the materialist philosophy of our times dogmatically denies any reality to the spiritual realm, the work of open-minded scientists has demonstrated that there are levels of reality in which normal phenomena such as telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psychokinesis, psychic healing, and other phenomena can work or play.

The work of scientists like Russell Targ, Harold Puthoff and Charles Tart has shown that there is a real and vitally important sense in which we are spiritual beings. These scientists were able to reconcile reductionist science and the spiritual by simply looking at empirical evidence for the existence of paranormal phenomena that point toward our spiritual nature.<sup>11</sup> Research conducted under controlled laboratory experiments at the University of California in Davis, and at the Stanford Research Institute, research using the scientific method divorced from scientific ideology, has demonstrated that humans do have a natural spiritual character and do exhibit spiritual abilities, to one degree or another, including the astonishing abilities of remote-viewing and out-of-body travel (OBE), by which one leaves the physical body and travels to other places. This research marks the beginning of an evidence-based spiritual science and a profound scientific awakening that will hugely influence our understanding of the deeper invisible forces continuously at work in our lives.

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<sup>10</sup> Dawkins R. and Krauss L. (2012) *Something from Nothing*, at ANU (Canberra Australia)

<sup>11</sup> Tart Ch. (2009) *The End of Materialism: How Evidence of the Paranormal is Bringing Science and Spirit Together*; Targ R. (2012) *The Reality of ESP: A Physicists Proof of Psychic Abilities*.

Stanislav Grof, author of *The Holotropic Mind: The Three Levels of Human Consciousness and How They Shape Our Lives*, describes the work of Tart, Targ, and Putthof as follow:

“Our ability to leave our physical bodies and travel to other places has been demonstrated in controlled laboratory experiments by researchers with good academic credentials. These include Charles Tart at the University of California in Davis, and Russell Targ and Harold Puthoff at the Stanford Research Institute. Russell Targ's research of “remote viewing” involves two people. The “viewer” stays in a carefully controlled laboratory environment while a “beacon” person is located somewhere outside that vicinity. A computer then selects a location that is unknown to the viewer.

The beacon person is secretly notified where he or she is to go, based on the computer's random selection of a site. After the beacon person gets to the site, the viewer is asked to describe what the beacon person is seeing. The distance between the beacon person and the viewer appears to have no significant effect on the viewer's ability to accurately describe the site; the distance between them can be a few blocks or many thousand miles. In several successful attempts, a Soviet psychic not only accurately described the location of Targ's associate Keith Harary who acted as a beacon, he also described what Harary would see at the next computer-selected site — even before he got there or knew what he would see!”

Further evidence supporting the hypothesis of the spiritual nature of human beings comes from hospital-based research performed by cardiologist Pim Van Lommel in the Netherlands. Van Lommel gathered hundreds of testimonies of people who experienced an enhanced consciousness of self after cardiac arrest, which is when the heart has stop beating, after the cessation of breathing, and after the brain has stopped functioning.<sup>12</sup> For more than two decades Van Lommel studied near-death experiences (NDEs) in patients who survived these traumatic biological events. His work demonstrates that the NDE is an authentic experience which cannot be attributed to imagination, psychosis, or oxygen deprivation. In Van Lommel's opinion, the current views on the relationship between the brain and consciousness held by most physicians, philosophers and psychologists is too narrow for a proper understanding of the NDE phenomenon. Van Lommel's research provides examples of ways in which our consciousness does not always coincide with brain function, and that consciousness can even be experienced separate from the body.<sup>13</sup> Research results obtained by open-minded scientists like Tart, Puthoff, Targ and Van Lommel mark an extraordinary argument of the union of non-ideological science and spirituality, and explains why a *truly* rational viewpoint must address the reality of a spiritual world.

On the opposite side, modern psychiatry and its philosophical parents of naturalistic materialism, while posing as "authorities" on the human mind and mental health, keep running lab tests, brain scans, X-rays, chemical imbalance tests or whatever might verify that any mental disorder is a physical condition. Biological psychiatry has yet to convincingly prove the genetic/biologic cause of any single mental illness. Patients have been diagnosed with "chemical imbalances" despite the fact that no test exists to support such a claim. There's not even a real conception of what a correct chemical balance would even look like.<sup>14</sup> No biochemical, neurological, or genetic markers have been found for attention deficit disorder (ADD), oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), depression, schizophrenia, anxiety disorder, compulsive alcohol and drug abuse or any other so-called mental illness or disease.<sup>15</sup> After decades of dominance, materialistic science faces a crisis of legitimacy that brings into question the basic philosophical assumptions of scientific research and practice.

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<sup>12</sup> Van Lommel P. MD (2011) *Consciousness Beyond Life, The Science of the Near Death Experience*

<sup>13</sup> Van Lommel P. MD, Van Wees R. PhD, Meyers V. PhD, Elfferich I. PhD (2001) The Lancet Medical Journal: *Near-death experience in survivors of cardiac arrest: a prospective study in the Netherlands*

<sup>14</sup> Kaiser D. (1996) *Against Biologic Psychiatry*; <sup>15</sup> Levine B. (2003) *Common Sense Rebellion: Taking Back Your Life from Drugs, Shrinks, Corporations, and a World Gone Crazy*

*"Once the soul awakens, the search begins and you can never go back."*

- Joe O'Donohue

## Nubia: Path to Awakening

Ancient Nubia, also known as the Kingdom of Kush, once bordered Egypt on the south extending along the Nile from the First until the Sixth Cataract. Although the term Nubia seems first mentioned in Strabo's *Geographica*, among most scholars the origin of the term is still disputed.

The earliest Egyptian written documents refer to Lower Nubia as *Ta-Seti*, meaning “Land of the Bow,” while Egyptian records of trade missions suggest that the name Nubia derives from the Egyptian term *Nub*, which means “Gold,” because in pharaonic times the Egyptians obtained precious metals and other merchandise from Nubia.<sup>16</sup> It is therefore possible to partially link ancient Nubia to the legendary Land of Punt, called by the Egyptians *Pwenet/Pwene*, a trading partner known for producing and exporting gold, aromatic resins, ebony, ivory, wild animals and slaves.<sup>17</sup>

Another name used by the ancient Egyptians to refer to Punt was *Ta-Netjer*, meaning “The Land of God,”<sup>18</sup> since it was believed to be the ancestral homeland of the Sun God Osiris.<sup>19</sup> Although mainstream opinion places Punt in Eastern Africa, in what is today northern Somalia, Djibouti, Eritrea, Northeast Ethiopia, the Red Sea coast of Sudan, at present the exact location still remains a mystery. Some scholars suggest that Punt was in Southern Arabia, or even in Palestine/Lebanon<sup>20</sup>, while others consider Punt nothing more than a myth.<sup>21</sup>

This paper does not support the mainstream assumptions but is in line with the studies of Nigerian authors like professor Catherine Acholonu, who has provided overwhelming archaeological and historical evidence that the legendary Land of God known in Egyptian records as Punt was not located in North Africa, as most Egyptologists and Western historians tell us, but rather in West Africa.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Nubia Museum (2013) *History of Nubia*

<sup>17</sup> Shaw I. & Nicholson P. (1995) *The Dictionary of Ancient Egypt*, British Museum Press, London., p.231.

<sup>18</sup> Sweeney E. (2008) *The Genesis of Israel and Egypt*, p. 72

<sup>19</sup> Scott E. (2012) *Hatshepsut, Queen of Sheba*, p. 61

<sup>20</sup> Morenz S. (1973) *Egyptian Religion* (Cornell University Press), p. 19

<sup>21</sup> Jones D.C. (2008) *The Origin of Civilization: The Case of Egypt and Mesopotamia from several disciplines*, p. 361

<sup>22</sup> Acholonu O. C. (2011) *Igbo Language: A Former Global Lingua Franca And The Mother of Semitic Languages*

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, another term to refer to ancient Nubia was “kush,” a name also given to the early kingdom prior to the Greeks that emerged late in the 4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE. The first reign of Kush dominated Upper Nubia for almost a thousand years and was followed by two later periods known as Napata and Meroë. The most important remains of this civilization are found at Kerma, the ancient capital that owes its name to the modern city located south of the Third Cataract, on the east bank of the Nile.

With twice as many pyramids as Egypt, Sudan represents archaeologically one of the richest countries in the world. Yet, most of Sudan remains unexcavated. While ancient Egypt has been the focus of much attention and research, ancient Nubia has largely been ignored. As a result, archaeologists and historians have little idea of its layout in ancient times. Today, there are many different explanations on the origin and meaning of the term *kush*, for which etymological references are mainly found in sacred scriptures like the Old Testament or mythological narrative.

According to professor Catherine Acholonu, who researched African prehistory and linguistic migrations for more than twenty years, *Kush* was the African name of *Khem* (Greek Ὀσίρις), the great civilizer who traveled all over the world, known among people by a number of different names (e.g., Rama, in Indian).<sup>23</sup> Catherine Acholonu's research also shows that the achievements of Khem/Osiris in his world-civilizing mission are recorded in ancient mythologies, worldwide, under the general name of Kush, a word derived from the ancient Kwa clan-name *Akwu Nshi*—the Mega-Igbo name of the West African First People.<sup>24</sup>

The black-skinned origin of Kushitic civilization is also supported by the affirmation of Greek historians like Diodorus Siculus, who described the people who lived along the Nile south of Egypt as black, flat nosed, and woolly haired.<sup>25</sup> It must be particularly emphasized that the Greeks and Romans clearly saw black-skinned Africans as a separate group of people, and that the word used to describe them “Aithiops,” not only was applied to Ethiopians, but also to other Africans.<sup>26</sup> After all, “Ethiope” is also the name of a large Nigerian community that still today lives in the Niger Delta.

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<sup>23</sup> Acholonu O. C. (2011) *Igbo Language: A Former Global Lingua Franca And The Mother of Semitic Languages*

<sup>24</sup> The word *Kush*, pronounced *Kwush* in Egyptian native tongue and in Semitic, is derived from Igbo word *Akwu Nshi* (First People) and is preserved in *Akwa Nshi*, the native name of the monoliths of Ikom, Cross River State. As the Founder of the Indian civilization, his name is preserved in the generic name of the People of India – Hindu Kush.

<sup>25, 26</sup> Appiah K.A & Gates H.L. (2009) *Encyclopedia of Africa, Volume 1*, p. 137

It must be also remembered that most of what has been written about the kingdom of Kush (Nubia) originated from its enemies. First and foremost the Egyptians, but also from Hebrews, Greeks, Romans and, last but not least, from Egyptologists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century like Karl R. Lepsius and George A. Reisner. The forefathers of modern Egyptology have conscientiously struggled with Nubia and Kush, as well as Nubian prehistory, often driven by prejudice towards its largely black population and by political opportunism. It should therefore come as no surprise that even today for many Western-centric scholars the racial identity of the Nubians remains problematic.

Lepsius was absolutely convinced that skin pigmentation was a determinant of intellectual ability and enlightenment. He asserted that the Greek term “Athiopia,” when referring to the ancient civilized people of Kush, did not apply to “negroes.” Harvard professor Reisner weighed in negatively as well. Although Reisner's achievement and work remains almost unparalleled in the annals of archaeology, one cannot remain impassive in the face of his assertions that Nubian cultures were not as developed as the Egyptian because the people were of mixed race, or that the darker-skinned native “negroid” population “had never developed either its trade or any industry worthy of mention”.<sup>27</sup>

Much of Reisner's unabashed racist interpretations and scientific distortions were widely published in scholarly journals at the time and have shaped the attitudes of the Western-centric scholarship for many years to come. Today, as it will be shown in this paper, the scientific racism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century has been replaced by a materialistic orthodoxy failing to acknowledge and interpret the great spiritual treasure left behind by the pyramid-building culture of ancient Nubia and, above all, the spiritually advanced ethnic groups of the ancient African continent.<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the most important aspect of the study of Nubian prehistory is that there has been no absolutely conclusive agreement among mainstream scholars on the origins of the Nubian empire and, even though many scholars have voiced absolute opinions, their absolute opinions are not unified. They do not know with any certainty where the Nubian/Kushitic culture actually originated. This is because latter-day Egyptians and Western Egyptologists, exactly as Lepsius and Reisner attempted to obliterate, or at least obfuscate, all records of the Black origins of Egyptian civilization.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, although Lepsius predicted that decipherment of the Nubian Meroitic inscriptions would be easy, to this date no one, not even distinguished scholars, have been able to decipher Meroitic.

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<sup>27, 28</sup> Kendall T. (2012) *Black Kingdom's of the Nile, Racism and the Rediscovery of Ancient Nubia*

<sup>29</sup> Acholonu O. C. (2011) *Igbo Language: A Former Global Lingua Franca And The Mother of Semitic Languages*

Another source of information particularly useful for tracing the origin of the term “kush” is Biblical narrative. According to the Hebrew Bible, Kush was the eldest son of Ham (Ham was the name of the youngest son of Noah the ark builder) <sup>30</sup>, and the father of Canaan <sup>31</sup>, and Nimrod, the great-grandson of Noah, the founder of the kingdom of Babylon, as well as the builder of the tower of Babel.<sup>32</sup> Biblical genealogy also tells us that Abraham the patriarch and his ancestors were of Kushitic origin.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Abraham's presence in Mesopotamia may be linked to the ancient Land of Kush. Let's not forget that the Kings of Sumer were often referred to as the “Kings of Kush,” while Greek writer Homer alluded to the two Kushite empires, when he wrote “a race divided, whom the sloping rays; the rising and the setting sun surveys”.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, both Biblical narrative as well as Greco-Roman writers are now supported by recent studies in Archaeogenetics that confirm an ancient migration of Kushites from Africa to Eurasia, India, and beyond.<sup>35</sup>

**Fig. 1:** the Kushite haplogroup R distribution <sup>36</sup>

The Kushite spread of haplogroup R from ancient Nubia has been traced to Sub-Saharan Africa, which supports the presumption that the Kushites are descendants of black people who moved to the Upper Nile from southern parts of Africa like Niger-Congo (Nilo-Saharan) to Eurasia during the Neolithic period.<sup>37</sup>



Moreover, there will be presented plenty of linguistic, archaeological and cultural evidence in this paper that will identify the Niger-Congo area as the place of origin from which Egypt and the rest of the world learned much in terms of cosmology, astronomy, religion, and the cult of the sun god.

<sup>30</sup> Gen. 2:13; 10:6–8; Ezek. 38:5; I Chron. 1:8–10

<sup>31, 32</sup> Bambata Dolo S.S. (2012) *The Genesis of the Bible*, p. 664

<sup>33</sup> Linsley A.C. (2010) notes that in Genesis, we first met Abraham and his family in Mesopotamia, but their ancestors were from Kush or ancient Nubia. Abraham's family resided in the Tigris–Euphrates River Valley because that is where Nimrod built a vast kingdom.

<sup>34, 35, 36, 37</sup> Winters C.A. (2010) *The Kushite Spread of Haplogroup R1\*–M173 from Africa to Eurasia*, Uthman dan Fodio Institute, Chicago, 60643, United States of America, Current Research Journal of Biological Sciences 2(5), ISSN: Maxwell Scientific Organization



An interesting example of genetic, linguistic and archaeological evidence that has verified the reliability of biblical narrative is found among the ethnic groups of Nigeria. Mitochondrial research indicates that the ancestors of the Igbo people, who belong to haplogroup L1, like the majority of West Africans formerly lived just below Egypt in the Land of Kush, before they moved westward into Cameroon, the Niger Valley and Senegambian regions.<sup>39</sup>

According to Biblical scholar Alice C. Linsley, the Igbo are closely related to the Land of Kush since before the time of the pharaohs. Some of them were rulers over both Land of Kush and Egypt, in a time when national boundaries as we know them today did not exist, but were marked by rivers which were controlled by local chiefs who paid part of their tribute to the King.<sup>40</sup>

In Nigeria, these rulers are known as “Sarkin Kano” or “Kano Kings”. The African word *kano* is the percusor or equivalent which is the equivalent of the word *Cain*. According to Genesis genealogy, Enoch<sup>41</sup> (Heb. Hanok, חֲנוֹךְ), was a son of Cain (*Kano*), and the grandson of Adam (from Igbo *Adaa-m*, “I have fallen”). Cain, after killing his brother Abel, was exiled by God to the Land of Nod, east of Eden. In fact, the term *nod* is intended to mean “wandering”. It is immediately evident that the words *nod* (נֹד) and *nok* (נוֹךְ) are almost identical in Hebrew. This was first recognized by the Nigerian philologist Modupe Oduyoye, who drew a connection between Cain (*Kano*) and the ancient metal worker culture of Nok (*Enoch*), that once flourished during the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BCE in the Jos Plateau of Nigeria.<sup>42</sup>

However, the Igbo are not directly related to the Israelites and are not descendants of Jacob, the founder of the Israelites. The Igbo belong to haplogroup L1, while the Israelites belong largely to haplogroup J1 and J2. It seems that the Igbo ancestors intermarried with the people of Nok to whom they were probably related by blood. This, however, was before the time of the Israelites, and even before the time of the Arabs. Historically and linguistically speaking, the Igbo language is far older than Hebrew, since it was already a distinct language 4000 BCE.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Linsley A.C. (2010) *Are the Igbo Related to the Israelites*, Open Anthropology Cooperative

<sup>39</sup> Levinson D. & O'Leary T. (1995) *Encyclopedia of World Cultures: Africa and the Middle East* G.K. Hall

<sup>40</sup> Alice C. Linsley is a Christian Apologist and since more than 30 years a scholar of Biblical Anthropology. She teaches Philosophy and Ethics, and she is a member of ASA, American Scientific Affiliation

<sup>41</sup> ENOCH means “PLACE,” a city built by Cain and named after his eldest son Enoch (Gen. 4:17)

<sup>42</sup> Modupe Oduyoye (1983) *Sons of the Gods and the Daughters of Men: Genesis 1–11*

<sup>43</sup> Adiele Afigbo (2005) *Igbo History and Society*, ed. Toyin Falola

Additional linguistic evidence of an Igbo origin of language connecting Nigeria and Egypt, indeed, as well India and Nepal, is in the words *sarki* and *harwa*. The word “sarki” is used to denote ruler-priests in West and Central Africa, as well an ethnic group living in the Orissa region of India. In Nepal, the sarkis are referred to as “Haruwa,” while the word *haruwa* is equivalent to the word *harwa*, meaning “priest” in ancient Egypt.<sup>44</sup>

There are many other Egyptian words of Igbo origin, as demonstrated by the monumental work of professor Catherine Acholonu.<sup>45</sup> To cite a few examples, the Egyptian word for “gods” is *ntr* or *neter*, meaning “guardian” or “watcher”. Its Igbo percusor-equivalent is *onetara*, meaning “He who guards and watches”. The highest and oldest of the known gods of Egypt was *ptah*, meaning “He who fashions things by carving and opening up”. Ptah is the equivalent of the Igbo word *okpu-atu*, meaning “He who molds/fashions things by carving and opening up.” Moreover, the name of the sun god *Ra*, meaning “Sun/daylight,” comes from the Igbo word *ora*, a term used by Igbo priests for “sun” or “daylight”. Perhaps the most important of all, however, is the name *Horus*. Horus was the son of Osiris, and the name is brought into Greek by the Egyptian word *heru*, which is translated as “face” or “Face of the Sun”. Its Igbo origin is *iru*, having exactly the same translation. Igbo initiates marked themselves with *ichi*, the symbol of the sun, a word derived from another name of the sun/daylight, *chi*, which is also the name of the spirit of God in Man. From the Igbo word *ichi* originated the Greek word *Χριστός*: Christ.<sup>46</sup>

The hypothesis of an Igbo origin of language, culture and civilization is based not only on etymological evidence, but also on the compelling fact that the texts of several inscribed artifacts unearthed by British archaeologist Thurstan Shaw in the 1960s at Igbo-Ukwu in Nigeria<sup>47</sup> show striking similarities to ancient scriptures of the Middle East, such as the Egyptian and Cretan hieroglyphics, as well as Old Phoenician and Old Sumerian hieroglyphics. This archaeological scriptural evidence strongly supports the theory that there was a civilization based in Igboland, now lost, which gave birth to Middle Eastern civilizations, writing systems, and spoken languages.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Linsley A.C. (2009) *The Order of Melchizedek*

<sup>45</sup> Acholonu C. (2009) *They Lived Before Adam: Prehistoric Origins of the Igbo, The Never Been Ruled*

<sup>46</sup> Acholonu C. (2009) *They Lived Before Adam*, etymology of the word *Christ*

<sup>47</sup> Shaw T. (1977) *Unearthing Igbo-Ukwu*, Oxford University Press

<sup>48</sup> Acholonu C. (2010) *The Lost Testament of the Ancestors of Adam*

# Igboland: The Revival of a Culture

The Igbo are a distinguished group of people who live in southeastern Nigeria as one of the three dominant ethnic groups, together with the Hausa and the Yoruba. Since ancient times, the Igbo have lived in the Lower Niger down to the Niger Delta area of the Bight of Biafra. To their east are the Annang/ Ibibio and Efik peoples. To the West are the Yoruba and Edo. To the North are the Hausa/Fulani groups. And to the South are the Ijaw/Ogoni kingdoms.

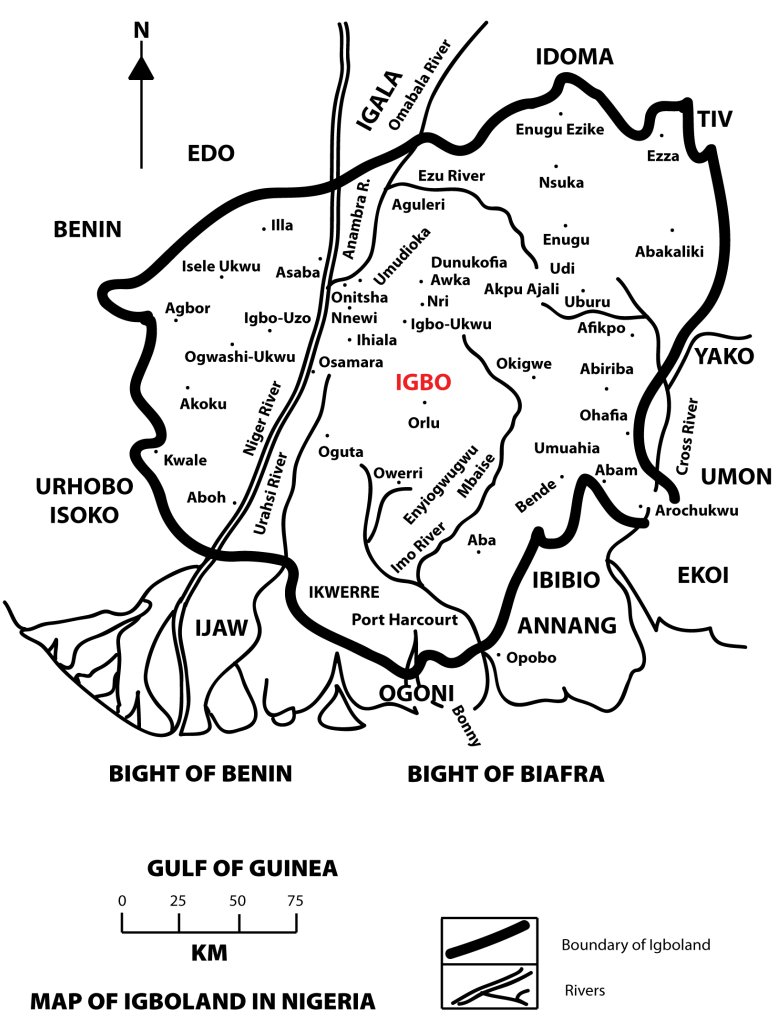
The traditional culture of Igbo people is called “Omenala Ndi Igbo”.<sup>49</sup> It envisages life as including the past, the present, and the future.

Cultural practices like prayer, farming, dancing, sacrifice, birth, marriage and death are there to maintain one's link with the spiritual world. The Igbo family includes the the living, the dead, and the unborn, for which reason abortion has no place in Igbo culture. A nuclear family is made up of the father, the mother, and children. It includes all those related by blood to a common ancestor.

Ancestor reverence, rather than ancestor worship, is a cultural norm among Igbo people that has secured the maintenance of law, order, unity, morality, stability, and identity in the community for thousands of years. In precolonial Igboland, the power of the people was their law, which derived force from their forebears. According to renowned Oxford ethnologist Denys Shropshire, “ancestor cult developed the spiritual faculties of man, especially his conscience”.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>49</sup> “Ome na Ala” literally means “that which is done on the land;” and that is custom, tradition, culture.

<sup>50</sup> Ogunyeremuba A.S. (2010) *Igbo Culture and the Christian Missions, 1857–1957: Conversion in Theory and Practice*, p. 204



Until a few years ago, traditional archaeology and classical studies did not provide much insight into the ancient past of Igbo people. Historians like Adiele E. Afigbo (1937–2009) argued that the Igbo are probably the least studied of any culture in Africa and have been seen even by neighboring ethnic groups as an enigma. However, things are beginning to change, or have already changed within the past two decades. Archaeological, anthropological, ethnographic, and linguistic studies are now attempting to recover the seminal past of Igbo people.

Palaeographic studies have shown that, despite a substantial loss of historically reliable documentation, and despite the difficulty of translation and transcription, the ancient Igbo have developed several ideographic writing systems, such as Nsibidi, Mbari, and Aniocha, all in order to express their abstract concepts and sacred science.

Anthropological and ethnological research confirms that, despite the dominance of Christianity and of Westernization in general, the belief in reincarnation is still very strong among the Igbo and in other ethnic groups in Africa. The term *ilo uwa* (reincarnation) is, paradoxically especially deeply rooted among Igbo Christians, which makes it almost impossible to eradicate from the consciousness of people in Igboland.<sup>51</sup>

It should be pointed out that, even if the concept of reincarnation is not officially recognized by the orthodox Christian Catholic faith, Jesus Christ himself did miraculously return to life after he was executed by crucifixion.<sup>52</sup> The resurrection of Jesus Christ, as a peculiarity of the cyclical nature of life made of flesh and soul, represents a clear reference to reincarnation and the process of the transmigration of the soul already studied by Empedocles and Pythagoras. In this regard, more evidence will be provided later to further deepen and consolidate the relationship between Igbo and Christian thinking.

Moreover, as clearly demonstrated by evidence collected by Catherine Acholonu<sup>53</sup>, the Jewish prayer Tikkun, as well Christian Holy Communion, both of which are characterized by the traditional “breaking of bread,” descend from the traditional Igbo ritual *Emume Oji* (kola-nut-breaking, sharing and eating), the oldest of such religious practices on earth!<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Echema A. (2010) *Igbo Funeral Rites Today: Anthropological and Theological Perspectives*, pp. 26, 27

<sup>52</sup> Scripture references: *Matthew 28:1–20; Mark 16:1–20; Luke 24:1–49; John 20:1–21:25.*

<sup>53</sup> Acholonu C. (2009) *They Lived Before Adam: Prehistoric Origins of the Igbo, The Never Been Ruled*

<sup>54</sup> Columbus Okoroike O. (2009) *Ibos of Nigeria and their Cultural ways, Aspects of Behavior, Attitudes, Customs, Language and social Life*, p. 180

One of the main difficulties faced in studying Nigerian prehistory and tracing the fundamental role of the Igbo people in the rise of civilization is the fact that modern professional scholarship on the subject of Africa did not emerge until the late 1950s.<sup>55</sup> And even after six decades of scholarship, the old-fashioned colonialist way of looking at black Africans has influenced the direction of “scientific” research.<sup>56</sup> In addition to racial prejudice, scholars have long held a belief that Africans had no history before the arrival of Europeans. Scholars have held this belief based on the assumption that a culture without written or pictorial records is not a civilized culture but essentially a “savage” one. Although written sources in Africa undoubtedly existed long before the arrival of Europeans, whenever anthropologists saw clear-cut evidence of an advanced culture, they tended to explain them away as products of Nigerian contact with non-African civilizations! In many cases, the idea that sub-Saharan Africa could have been a possible source of advanced, non-primitive thinking and practices for other ancient cultures in the North of Africa has often been excluded *a priori*.

A similar non-scientific approach to scholarly research has also permeated the study of Igbo-Ukwu, an archaeological site that has unearthed evidence of a quite surprising bronze-working culture that once flourished in Igboland. After having poorly dated only three sites to the 9<sup>th</sup> century A.D.<sup>57</sup> (I say poorly because for a culture to reach such richness and sophistication at least another thousand years would be needed <sup>58</sup>), archaeologists still know almost nothing about the society that produced the exquisite bronzes. To date, no other tradition of bronze casting is known into which the Igbo-Ukwu sculptures can be placed. These fine works of art lack antecedents, contemporaries, and immediate successors. Moreover, the theory that sub-Saharan Africa borrowed its metalworking technology from other cultures is no longer valid, since scientific evidence now demonstrates that West-Central Africa was already practicing iron working in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE.<sup>59</sup> Findings at Termit in eastern Niger, dated earlier than 2500 BCE, makes sub-African iron working older than that of the Middle-East, and far older than that of ancient Nubia and Egypt.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Falola T. and Aderinto S. (2010) *Nigeria, Nationalism and Writing History*

<sup>56</sup> Connah G. (1981) *New Studies in Archaeology: Three Thousand Years in Africa, Man and his environment in the Lake Chad in Nigeria*, p. 1

<sup>57</sup> Cradock P.T., Ambers J., Duncan R. Hook, Farquhar R. M., Shaw T., Chikwendu E.V., Umeji A.C. (Winter, 1997) *Metal Sources and the Bronzes from Igbo-Ukwu, Nigeria*, pp. 405–429

<sup>58</sup> Asonye Ihenacho D. (2004) *African Christianity Rises: A Critical Study of the Catholicism of the Igbo of Nigeria*.

<sup>59</sup> Hamady B. (2004) *The origins of iron metallurgy in Africa: new light on its antiquity, West & Central A.*

<sup>60</sup> Lobban R. A. (2004) *Historical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval Nubia*, pp. 193, 194

Recent studies of several bronze artifacts unearthed at Igbo-Ukwu has brought to light more fascinating evidence. These sculptures, beside being examples of some of the most outstanding African art, also contain several elements of traditional Igbo religion, cosmology and astrophysical concepts that are scientifically correct by the most modern scientific standards. One of these sculptures, named by Catherine Acholonu “Hyperball” (i.e. a torus) <sup>61</sup>, is illustrated in this paper.



**Pictures:** Igbo-Ukwu bronze torus hyper-doughnut (left); molecular Torus surrounds Black Hole (right).<sup>62</sup>

From the historical and scientific perspective the Igbo-Ukwu torus model of the universe popularized by Stephen Hawking in his book *A Brief History of Time: From the Black Holes to the Big Bang* <sup>63</sup>, and by Michio Kaku in his book *Hyperspace: A scientific Odyssey Through Parallel Universes, Time warps and the tenth Dimension* <sup>64, 65</sup>, represents evidence that ancient Igbo-Ukwu thinkers possessed a sophisticated level of cosmological and scientific knowledge.

There's a popular and ironic saying in Italy that talks about “the discovery of warm water,” referring to a concept already known for a long time, which now someone is trying to convey as new. For too long now, modern-day science has asked us to believe that our culture is the only reliable source of genuine knowledge. But ancient Igbo culture has much to tell us about our universe. So let's continue the journey.

<sup>61</sup> Animalu A. O. E. and Acholonu C. (2010) *HYPERSPACE AND THE TORUS REVISITED: AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE ON THE THEORY OF EVERYTHING*

<sup>62</sup> Illustration credit Beckmann V. (NASA, GSFC), [apod.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html](http://apod.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html) USED

<sup>63</sup> Hawking S. (1988) *A Brief History of Time: From the Black Holes to the Big Bang*

<sup>64</sup> Kaku M. (1994) *Hyperspace: A scientific Odyssey Through Parallel Universes, Time warps and the tenth Dimensions*, Oxford University Press, Inc. <sup>65</sup> also see the grid pattern of Philip Emeagwali's Hyperball

Another field of study nearly unknown in the West is that of sub-Saharan Africa's cultural landscapes. As unbelievable as it may sound, over the past forty years garden and landscape studies published in the West yielded only three brief articles on sub-Saharan Africa. It means that African cultural landscapes are not only marginalized, but are perhaps the most marginalized in the world, as if black Africans haven't designed anything of real value.

Fortunately, there are scholars today who contribute to a growing public understanding of African cultural landscapes – including precolonial landscapes – and how perceptions of these landscapes were altered during the era of colonialism.<sup>66</sup>

A careful study in this field has revealed that the union between artificial and natural environments also played an important role in shaping the cultural landscape of the Igbo people. Geometric shapes like the circle, square, and cone are the basic forms engaged in the creation of sacred landscapes, ceremonial places, shrines, houses or funerary structures.<sup>67</sup> These simple but sacred shapes, underpinned by a complex African spirituality rooted in tradition, constitute indispensable elements of Igbo culture.

Anthropological and archaeological studies have shown that, among different Igbo village-groups, conical mounds were very important in the veneration of the dead. Igbo veneration required only a locus through which to reach the deity. It might have been a living tree, stakes in the earth, a cone of earth or clay, etc. Mud cones were made from a special mud from termite hills. This mud could be shaped and covered with a more-liquid mud that could be polished. Igbo cones were made in any size from small to very large ones resembling pyramids. The scholar of Igbo culture, G.I. Jones (1904–1995), describes the largest known example as a mound of earth piled up to the lower branches of a large rainforest tree almost five meters high (ca. 16 feet), so that the tree appears to be growing out of the mound.<sup>68</sup> The correspondence with other pyramid-building cultures (the metaphor of the Tree of Life growing out of the primeval mound) is evident. According to professor Catherine Acholonu, *Oda* is the primeval mound of all *Ndi Igbo* (Igbo people) and functions as the Place of Judgement called *ebe ebe*, which is the etymological root word for the Egyptian word *benben*.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Green J. (2008) *The Dirt, Uniting the Built & Natural Environments*, American Society of Landscape Architects

<sup>67</sup> Ismail Y. and Roxario P. (2001) *Nigeria, Shapes and Styles*, p. 70

<sup>68</sup> Kuyk B.M. (2003) *African Voices in the African Heritage*, pp. 164, 165

<sup>69</sup> see Acholonu C. (2010) *The Lost Testament of the Ancestors of Adam*, published by CARC





**Picture:** the village of Otobo Dunoka, Lejja, near Nsukka, Nigeria; showing the ceremonial area, the magical tree *Utu Udeleigwe*, the conical sacred altar known as *Odegwo*, and the House of Fire, or spirit house (right). Credit: Liz Bird

Among the Igbo, when the locus of worship was placed in the house, there was raised a platform associated with it. Some ethnographers speculated that the Igbo cones are phallic symbols, but no evidence supports this conclusion. Rather, the cone as a symbol and the custom of placing it upon an altar reflects very much Egyptian religious ceremonies when cones of baked clay or, to be more precise, votive pyramids were set out upon altars for gods and ancestors.<sup>69</sup>

Even today, in many areas of Igboland the erection of individual cone-shaped altars made of clay or soil is very prominent. They are used for private as well as public worship and are often located in villages' public ceremonial places (photo above). Routine worship includes the daily offerings made by the head of a household or community to the ancestors in kola-nuts, lines of white chalk, and prayers for protection. On top of these earthen mounds are often placed stones and an earth disc facing the rising sun<sup>70</sup>, in honor of *chi-ukwu* ("Great Chi"), which is central to Igbo spirituality and thought.

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<sup>69</sup> Djurdjevic N. M. (2008) *The Sacred Benben of Donji Moštre*, p. 3

<sup>70</sup> Mbaegbu C.C. (2012) *Traditional Rational Arguments for the Existence of God (Chi-ukwu) in Igbo Traditional Philosophy*, p. 37

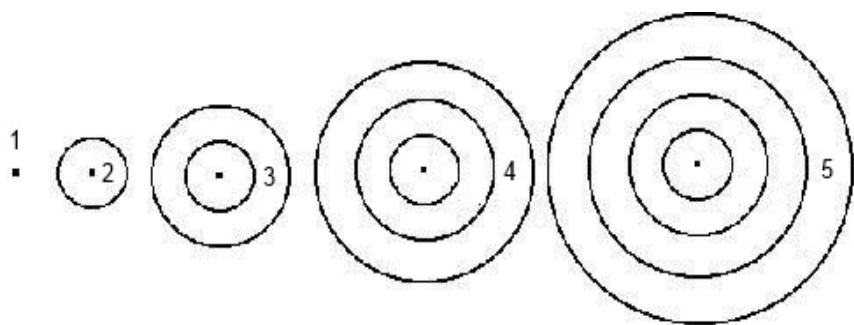
<sup>71</sup> Keith Booker M. (2003) *The Chinua Achebe Encyclopedia*, p. 53





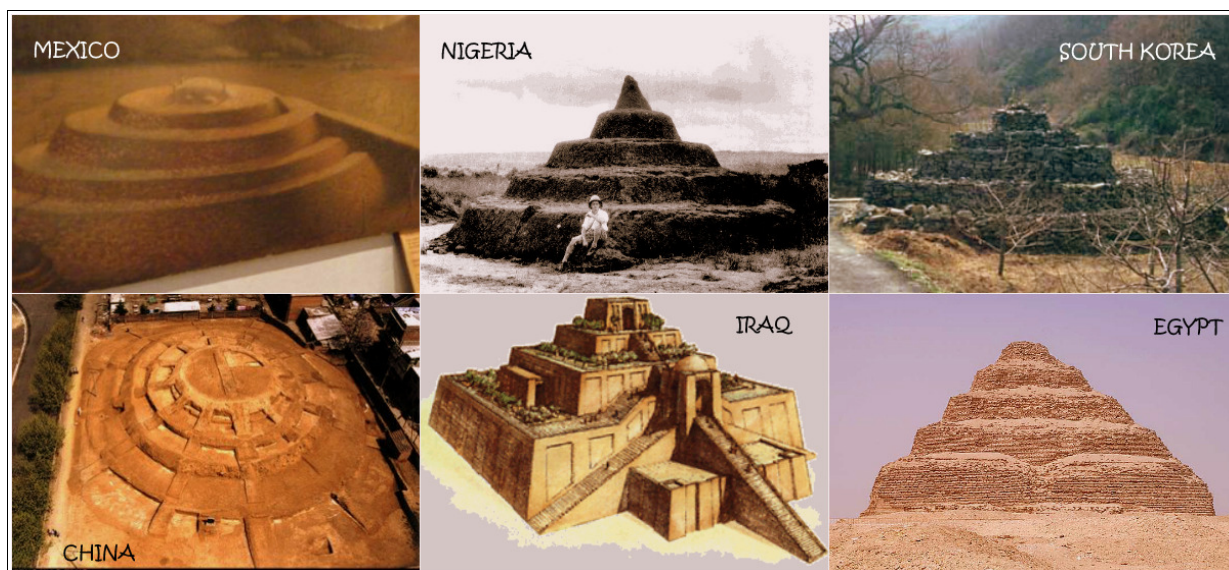
**Pictures:** 5-tier circular pyramids photographed by missionaries in the 1930s, Nusde, Enugu State of Nigeria (left), Igbo maiden with elaborate hair style with spiral patterns (right) – Credit G.I. Jones

At least ten circular pyramid structures are known to have once existed in Nsude, Enugu State of Nigeria, before being destroyed by colonialists to make sure they were not entered into any existing official records. They were made of mud and clay, with five circular tiers laid one above the other. As elsewhere, the five-tier pyramids of Nigeria are symbolic of sacred mountains like Mount Meru and other sacred mountains, such as Sumeru, Moriah, Olympus, Zion and others. They all represent a sacred symbol of ascension to the heavenly summit in the afterlife. In Igbo tradition, sacred mountains, hills, and other lands are seen as the abodes of certain deities. A simple and comprehensible explanation of creation cosmology is presented below.



**Figure 2:** different manifestations of the created universe from its highest to its lowest point

1. Divine Source – The Seed 2. The World of Divinity – Fire – The First Light 3. The World of Creation – Water – The Primordial Ocean 4. The World of Formation – Air – The Spiritual Element 5. The World of Action – Earth – The Material Body of Living Things



**Pictures:** examples of five-tier pyramids found around the world

The five layers are a common theme in ancient pyramid building, found in the five-tier organization of Babylonian ziggurats, five-tier pyramid of King Zoser at Saqqarra, five-tier Mexican, Chinese and Korean pyramids, and, last but not least, five-tier Hindu funeral pyres. As a sacred symbol of ascension to the heavenly afterlife, the Nigerian pyramids are proof positive that the Igbo people had developed specific cosmological and spiritual concepts in prehistoric times.<sup>72</sup>

It may be reasonably suggested that the concept of the primeval mound, which ancient Egyptians incorporated in their earliest tombs, temples, and mastabas in the form of small mounds of earth <sup>73</sup>, directly descended from the Igbo creation myth, when Eri the sky God came down to earth and had to stand on an ant-heap, as all lands were water.<sup>74</sup>

Many features of Igbo sacred science have been preserved through oral tradition. Beliefs related to afterlife, the immortality of the soul, and reincarnation are expressed in different contexts by the most powerful, universal, meaningful, and sacred of all symbols, the circle. Although here we are concerned mainly with the sacred science of Igbo people, it is important to point out that many other ethnic groups in Nigeria, like the Edo and Yoruba, as well other early cultures of sub-Saharan Africa, share similar, if not identical, spiritual beliefs.

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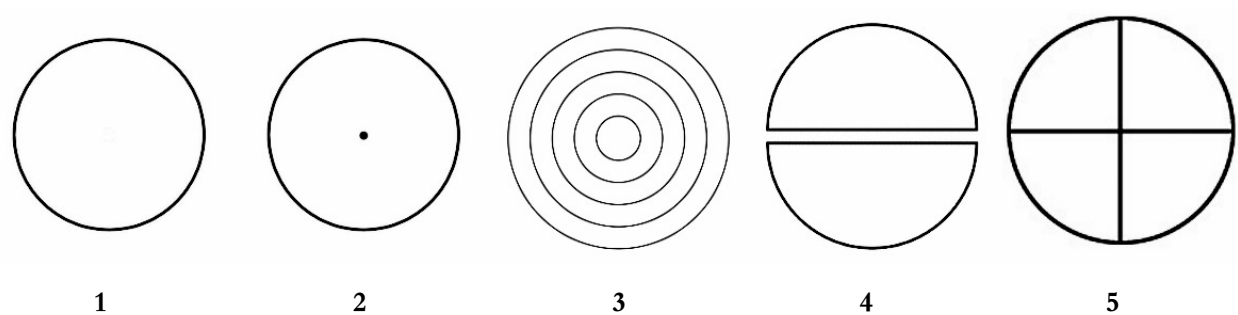
<sup>72</sup> Merick R. and Djurdjevic N. M. (2012) *Evidence of Vedic Cosmology and Harmonic Science in the Pyramid Civilization of Ancient Bosnia*

<sup>73</sup> Mounds of earth or sand were found within the earliest buildings as a symbol of the original site of all life.

<sup>74</sup> Okoh M. (2012) *Fostering Christian Faith in Schools and Christian Communities Through Igbo Traditional Values*, p. 94

# Entering the Circle

The symbol of the sacred circle dominates almost every aspect of life in prehistoric Africa. It is displayed as a decorative pattern on religious artifacts, is found in prehistoric rock art, and has inspired the construction of thousands of burials found throughout the sub-Saharan region, including ancient Nubia. Even when spoken language was different from tribe to tribe, culture to culture, civilisation to civilisation, the spiritual message of the sacred circle was timeless and understood by ancient African cultures. Only with the rise of cultural and scientific materialism and dogmatic religion did the sacred knowledge inherited from our ancestors become lost and become an unsolvable riddle for modern scholars.



**Fig. 3:** basic descriptions of the different representations of the sacred circle

- 1. The universal symbol of totality, original perfection, the unmanifest.
- 2. The symbol of cyclic perfection, or the completion of a cycle, and the sun gods.
- 3. The symbol of the created universe, or different levels of consciousness.
- 4. The 'Cosmic Egg'. The completion of a cycle of manifestation.
- 5. The Divine Quaternary.

In Africa, the sacred union of the circle and the square are rigorously symbolic, summarizing the fundamental relationship between the spiritual world and the human terrestrial condition. These forms represent the mystical relationship of the four elements and the return to primordial simplicity. It must be pointed out that anthropologists and other scholars of the Igbo often refer to the belief in reincarnation among them, but no systematic review on this subject exists. Yet the spiritual message brought by the Igbo from the past to the present holds the key to unlocking the spiritual significance of the pyramids, and it will allow us to identify the early origins of the most sought-after and legendary symbol of religious iconography: the Holy Grail.

**Picture:** Ofo “staffs of authority” decorated with quaternary and coiled-spiral/serpent symbolism. Courtesy: Hamill Gallery, Boston MA © 2013

Ofo staffs of authority have great symbolic importance as an object of social status in Igbo society. They serve to make contact with deities and to validate rituals such as oath-taking ceremonies. Ofo staffs of authority determine an Igbo individual's position



in Igbo society with respect to the right to give opinions, to pass judgment upon others, and to make offerings on behalf of the family and of the community to the highest deities. There's widespread belief among the Igbo that at death a soul passes into a realm of discarnate beings, a realm from which the soul is eager to return to terrestrial life. Therefore, an individual may continue to improve his status from incarnation to incarnation. Unlike the Hindus or Buddhists, the Igbo consider terrestrial life to be desirable, despite particular misfortunes, and have no aspiration to stop being reborn.<sup>75</sup>

The geometric signs that repeatedly appear in traditional Igbo religion *Odinani* are dots, lines, cruciforms, circles, and spirals in various configurations. In ceremonial worship or ancestor veneration, the different motifs are often related to the number four, a quaternary, assuming the form of a cruciform or encircled cross. As with medieval alchemists and other esoteric traditions, the encircled cross (Lat. *quadratura circuli*<sup>76</sup>) symbolizes the cyclical concept of time and the four primal elements that make up the material world (air, fire, earth, and water). Igbo cosmology also considers the four building blocks of the material world to be inhabited by “sparks” from several spirit hierarchies known as *Ndi Otu*.<sup>77</sup> Therefore, the fourfold symmetry of the Sacred Quaternary can be considered an archetype of wholeness whereby the square represents the earth in juxtaposition to the circle of the heavens (*elu na ala*, “as above, so below”), and the transformation of spirit into matter or vice versa (*ezi na uzo*, “as within, so without”).

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<sup>75</sup> Stevenson I. (1985) *The Belief in Reincarnation among the Igbo of Nigeria*

<sup>76</sup> Medieval alchemists blended philosophy and the physical sciences, and were particularly interested in metals and energy. They used the *Quadratura Circuli*, or squared circle, to represent the synthesis of the four primal elements – fire–air–earth–water – which they believed were the essence of all matter and energy.

<sup>77</sup> Anizoba E.K. (2008) *Ödinani: The Igbo Religion*



Furthermore, Igbo cosmology asserts that the universe is divided into four complex constituents known as *okike* (creation), *alusi* (supernatural forces and deities), *mmuo* (spirit), and *uwa* (world).<sup>78</sup> *Chi-ukwu*, as a supreme deity, is also seen as the author of time and, therefore, considered to be the creator of the traditional Igbo calendar composed of four days in a week (seven weeks in a month, thirteen months in a year, a year containing 364 days). The four days of the week are called *eke*, *afor*, *orie* and *nkwo*; named in honor of the *alusi* of the four points corresponding to the four cardinal directions; north, south, east and west.<sup>79</sup> Although the discovery, or naming, of the classical elements is generally credited to pre-Socratic philosopher Empedocles (c. 5th century BCE), the tradition of the Sacred Quaternary among Igbo people reaches much further back in the past when, according to Igbo myth, the supreme God *Chi-ukwu* gave them the knowledge of time. And this sacred number, four, and its multiples, shaped, and continuous to shape, the Igbo identity. The Igbo, more than any other culture, have preserved a concept of the cosmos that is both intellectually fascinating and complex and also functional in the daily lives of people.

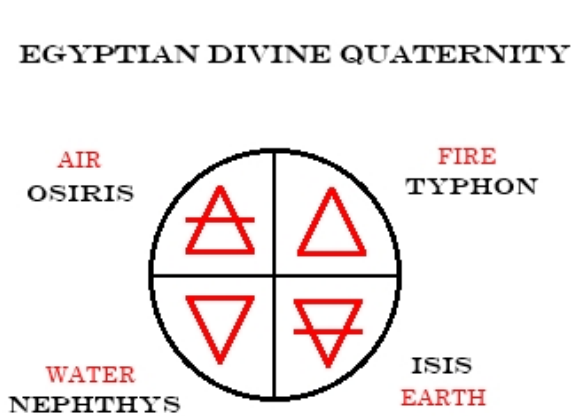


Fig. 4

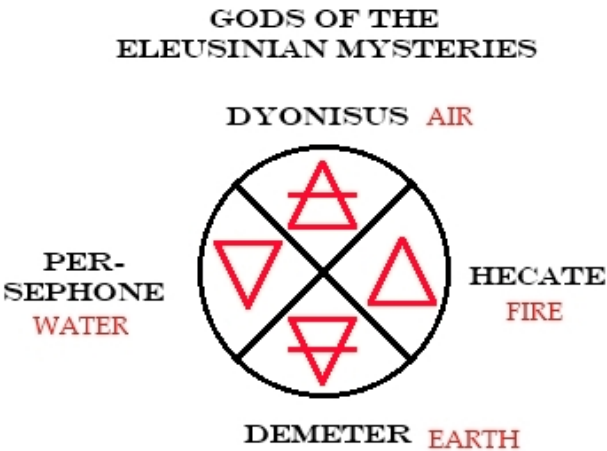


Fig. 5

Although most Western scholars have ignored African spiritual traditions in its search for the origins of Western civilization <sup>80</sup>, a thin thread of scientific research provides strong evidence that Igbo cosmology underpins ancient mystery traditions such as Greco-Egyptian magic (Fig. A), the underworld mysteries of Hecate, Demeter, Persephone and Dionysus (Fig. B), Orphic mysteries, Pythagorean philosophy, as well those of the Middle-East such as Zoroastrianism, Chaldean theurgy, etc.

<sup>78</sup> Alayande L. (2010) *Our Rainmaker*, p. 2

<sup>79</sup> Udeani C. (2007) *Inculturation as Dialogue: Igbo Culture and the Message of Christ*, p. 28

<sup>80</sup> The renowned author, prof. Peter Kinglsey, has not dedicated a single chapter in his remarkable books to the mystical traditions of black Africans.

Although there is no record of the origin of the Igbo calendar, scholars reasonably conjecture that it pre-dated the Egyptian calendar, which dates back to the 5th millennium BCE. In Nigeria, the Igbo four-day week is found among ethnic groups who share linguistic and cultural ties with the Igbo, such as the Edo, Yoruba, Beni, Igala, and Nupe. The four-day week is found in Gambia, Eastern Ghana, Southern Togo, Dahomey, and Cameroon. The zone of the four-day week extends into South-East Congo as well to the Ivory Coast. It is important to point out that the Igbo comprise one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, based largely in southeastern Nigeria, but also found in significant numbers in Cameroon and other African countries.

Modern scholars have not put this picture together, and one reason for this concerns methods of transmission of knowledge. In Africa, as elsewhere, before the invention of alphabets prehistoric rock art served as a significant knowledge-transmission system among indigenous communities. By carving stone, ancient Africans expressed, and preserved for posterity, philosophical thought, and religious. Although both ethnographic and archaeological data indicate that migratory groups can cover huge territories, African rock art is often studied in regional isolation and divided into regions which are rarely compared with each other. As a consequence, the “big picture” of the available data is seldom offered by anthropological or archaeological research scientists.<sup>81</sup>

An idea much preferred among modern archaeologists is that ancient ideas, values, and beliefs cannot be retrieved from archaeological data, because the evidence archaeologists work with links back only to what people in the past have done, not to what they thought, believed or experienced. The insistence that the history of peoples without a fully developed writing system cannot be fully known has a very strong foothold in modern research ideology. Thus, modern archaeologists believe that they have no way of compellingly reconstructing the messages found in rock art, unless there is a suitable record of continuity into more recent historic times.<sup>82</sup>

The mainstream view that is promoted is that, in looking for significance in prehistoric rock art, scientists should concentrate on historical periods more familiar to modern scholars, instead of looking for meaning in artifacts gathered from the distant past. Thus, a common tendency, and “easy way out,” among scholars today is an overall denial of the ancient spiritual values of people such the Igbo. This is a sad state of affairs, because it was those values, in part, that are the bedrock for much of our religious, scientific, and philosophical traditions today.

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<sup>81</sup> Byrnes A. (2007) *Rock Art Analysis and Issues – Methods of Analysis*

<sup>82</sup> Byrnes A. (2007) *Rock Art Analysis and Issues – Interpretative Comparative Approaches – Difficulties*

As a result, orthodox scientists still struggle to understand how (apparently) non-literate people stored and transmitted information. These scientists have lost track of how to decode the information — if indeed they ever had this knowledge — often densely compressed into rock art. Let's take an example of prehistoric rock art discovered in 1933 at the site of Bidzar, Cameroon, an astonishing find that has been swept under the rug of the scientific orthodoxy.



**Pictures:** petroglyphs at Bidzar, Cameroon (c. 2500–1500 BP), show elaborate examples of the Sacred Quaternary (left), and the five-layer model of the universe unfolding like a flower (right).<sup>83</sup>

After more than eighty years of study, archaeologists continue to claim that the most representative sacred symbols of African religion found at the prehistoric site of Bidzar:

“clearly have a meaning, but their interpretation is subjective. Moreover, local people have no clues about their meaning.”<sup>84</sup>

Is this science or an abdication of scientific responsibility and indeed the scientific method itself? The scholar who shuns the explosive relevance of these finds not only shows an incredibly narrow approach to the study of humankind's past but also denies the existence of a vast wealth of cultural and spiritual heritage belonging to a continent whose known history is older than any in the world. Below, we will endeavor to overcome the arbitrary limits imposed by an orthodoxy constrained by a “lazy man's ideology”.

<sup>83</sup> Oslisly R. (2011) Bradshaw Foundation – *The Rock Art of Western Central Africa*

<sup>84</sup> Credit: Bradshaw Foundation; source: [www.bradshawfoundation.com/central-africa/cameroon.php](http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/central-africa/cameroon.php)

**Picture:** base of small terracotta bowl from Okang Bang, Nigeria.<sup>85</sup> Credit: Christopher Slogar

Evidence of the widespread use of the Sacred Quaternary, or five-layer model of the universe, across Nigeria and other countries of West Central Africa can be retrieved from multiple sources such as oral tradition, linguistics, ethnology, sacred art, folklore, religious beliefs and practices and, last but not least, the archaeological record itself.



Ethnohistorical sources and archaeological evidence demonstrate that the fourfold concept of the cosmos existed among ethnic groups of West Central Africa long before European's arrived in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Even today, the Sacred Quaternary represents the most powerful and widespread religious symbol throughout West Central Africa. Despite some differences from one ethnic group to the other in the method of composition and the process by which the quaternary is illustrated, all share the basic configuration of a cruciform or a cruciform within a circle dividing the figure into symmetrical quadrants.



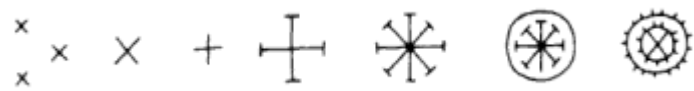
**Picture:** base of small terracotta bowl from Okang Bang, Nigeria.<sup>86</sup> Credit: Christopher Slogar

The most common of the geometric designs on terracotta objects or other artifacts are concentric circles, spirals, lozenges, and cruciforms in various configurations. The terracotta object in the photo is decorated with a central figure of five concentric circles (representing the five-layer of five-tier model of the universe) and a radial arrangement of parallel lines alternating with petal-like shapes in order to complete one of the many different graphic expressions of the Sacred Quaternary. It is interesting to note that the given example is composed of the same figurative elements like the petroglyphs at the site of Bidzar. The significance of each of the elements will be examined in this paper.

<sup>85, 86</sup> Slogar C. L. (2005) *Iconography and Continuity in West Africa: Calabar Terracottas and the Arts of the Cross River Region of Nigeria/Cameroon*, pp. 72, 73, 224 – National Commission for Museums and Monuments, Nigeria.



It should be also taken into account that the Bidzar petroglyphs and terracotta decorations show a strong correspondence with the earliest nonverbal form of communication known as Nsibidi (also spelled Nsibiri). The indigenous writing system mainly used in the cultures of the Cross River area, such as the Ekoi, Efik, and Igbo people, as well as in the cultures of related ethnic groups of southeastern Nigeria and Cameroon. There's no certain date when Nsibidi is thought to have been invented. Nevertheless, earliest pottery found at Afikpo, Ebonyi in Nigeria indicates it was already in use during the Neolithic period c. 5000 BCE.<sup>86</sup>



**Fig. 6:** examples of Nsibidi pictographs <sup>87</sup>

Nsibidi was transmitted mainly by oral tradition, and it is still widely used today as a vehicle of communication and for record-keeping in the culture of the Ekoi, who claim to have originated it, and in the context of institutions such as Ekpe (the Efik Leopard Society). The Ekpe society was also an institution among Igbo people, and historical research has shown specifically that the use of Nsibidi is most frequent among Igbo people in eastern Nigeria and the Cross River basin.<sup>88</sup> Although meanings of most Nsibidi pictographs still remain known only to members of secret African societies, many outsiders have come to know it, or at least know about it, over time. When a missionary in the early 1900s told a class of Igbo children that their people had no writing, one child piped up to argue that they had “Nsibidi”. The missionary also noted that many Igbo craftsmen knew Nsibidi, traveled widely, and took the knowledge everywhere they went. Oral tradition and pictographic studies have clearly shown that Nsibidi was used to express concepts and ideas as well as to tell stories. As today, so yesterday.<sup>89</sup> During ritual worship, both Nsibidi and quaternary symbols are drawn in white chalk on the ground within the environment of the shrines to establish a connection between the physical and spiritual realms. They are used during prayers to ensure protection and prosperity, they are used during traditional healing ceremonies, and they are also etched on various objects to create protective amulets, or talismans. Quaternary motifs, though not Nsibidi, may also be used for facial and body decoration among indigenous peoples (e.g., tattoos, painted designs, and scarifications).<sup>90</sup>

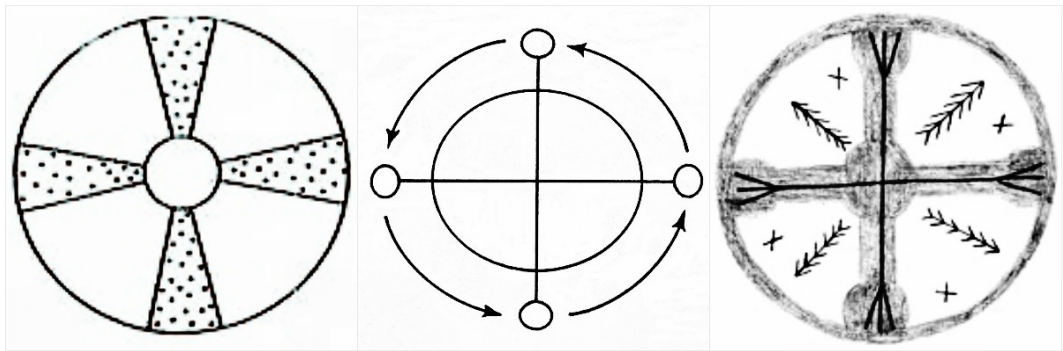
<sup>86</sup> Elechi O. O. (2006) *Doing justice without the state: the Afikpo (Eghubo) Nigeria model*, p.98

<sup>87</sup> Thompson R. F. (2010) *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*, p. 245

<sup>88, 89</sup> Kuyk B. M. (2003) *African Voices in the African American Heritage*, p. 149

<sup>90</sup> Talbot P. A. (1912) *In the Shadow of the Bush* – London: W. Heinemann

The symbol of the Sacred Quaternary has existed among various ethnic groups throughout West and Central Africa since prehistoric times. The symbol represents a remarkable array of key ideas. For instance, it emphasizes the cyclical nature of earthly life and the natural world, the spiritual journey of the soul of both living persons and the dead who are “cycling through incarnations.” (Fig. 7).



**Fig. 7:** bronze plaque design of Edo people, Benin, Nigeria (left)– *Dikenga dia Kongo* cosmogram of the Bakongo people (aka the Kongo) at the center <sup>91</sup> – *Igha ede*, Yoruba people, Nigeria (right). <sup>92</sup>

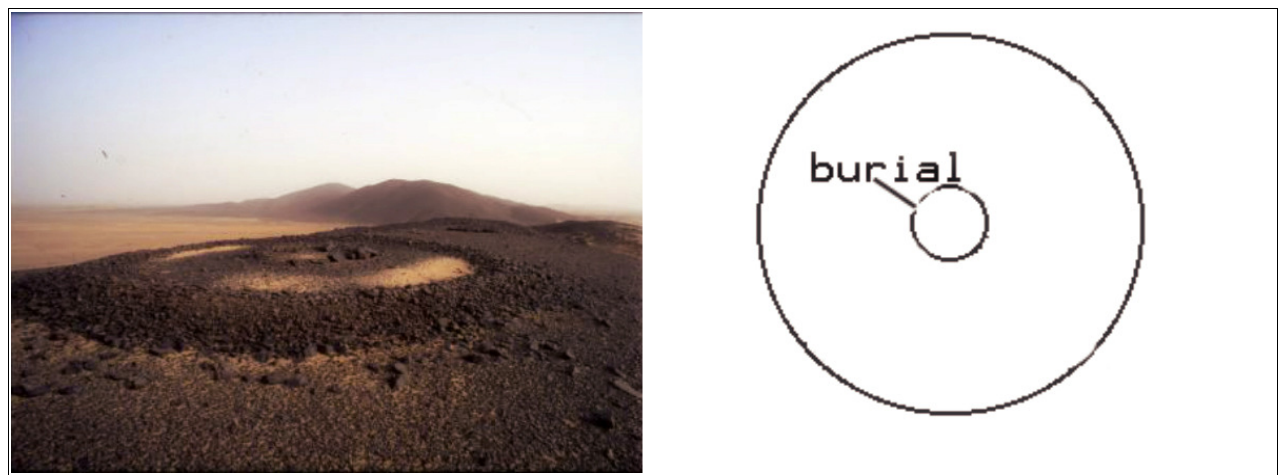
In African cosmology and religious tradition, the crossed lines (+) of the Sacred Quaternary communicate the oppositional ordering of the cosmos and the invocation of spiritual powers, the invitation to Spirit to enter the land of the living. The vertical line connects the Supreme Being above with the lower realm of lesser spirits, ancestor spirits, and the souls of the dead. The horizontal line represents the boundary between the land of the living and the realm of the spirits and the souls of the dead. <sup>93</sup>

The encircled cross represents “The Four Moments of the Sun,” <sup>94</sup> as well the classical elements (Earth, Water, Fire, Air). The top symbolizes the direction of north, the sun at noon, and the land of the living. The bottom represents the direction of south, the sun at midnight and, thus, the realm of the dead and spirits. The right-end represents the direction of east, the sun at dawn, and the nascence of spirit/soul and earthly life in a cosmic cycle. The left-end represents west, the sun at dusk, the movement from the living to the spirit world. As the archaeological evidence will show, it's no coincidence that since prehistoric times the Sacred Quaternary has been a source of inspiration for the building of thousands of circular burials throughout the Sudanese desert, Nubian funerary structures, and pyramids.

<sup>91</sup> Fennel Ch. (2007) *Cross Roads and Cosmologies: Diasporas and Ethnogenesis in the New World*  
<sup>92</sup> Rosen N. (1989) *Chalk Iconography in Olokun Worship* – African Arts, Vol. 22, No. 3 (May, 1989), pp. 44–53+88  
<sup>93</sup> Thompson Robert F. (1983) *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*  
<sup>94</sup> MacGaffey W. (1986) *Religion and Society in Central Africa: The Bakongo of Lower Zaire*

### At the Center of the Sun

The earliest Nubian cultures are known today, using abstract terminology introduced by American archaeologist George A. Reisner, as the “A-Group, B-Group, or X-Group”.<sup>95</sup> These cultures are especially interesting for their distinctive circular burial forms. Mostly located in Lower Nubia, circular burials of the A-Group (c. 5<sup>th</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> millennium BCE), and the C-Group (late 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BCE), are closely related to the earliest phase of the Kerma-Culture, which reached its peak circa 2500 BCE in the Kerma-basin, south of the Third Cataract in the Sudan.



**Image:** an example of prehistoric circular burial mound with a ring grave at the center, Sudan, c. 4500 BCE (Castiglioni A.; Vercoutter J.: *Das Goldland der Pharaonen*. Mainz 1998, p. 163) – Credit: Carlo Bergman

Many other cemeteries are scattered throughout the Sudanese desert. These are often found in clusters of ten or more circular superstructures made out of cut masonry and filled with sand and gravel. In a few cases, the superstructure is stepped, and even conical. Some of these are over ten meters in diameter and often incorporate an oblong stele on the perimeter of the structure, while the body of the deceased is buried in a depression at the center. The positioning of the deceased at the center of the circle is not coincidental and is archaeological evidence for an idea that the Neoplatonist would come up with millennia later: the Harmonization of the Center and the importance of the middle of the Four Elements. Important alchemical texts refer to this central point as the Point of the Sun (*Punctus Solis*).<sup>96</sup>

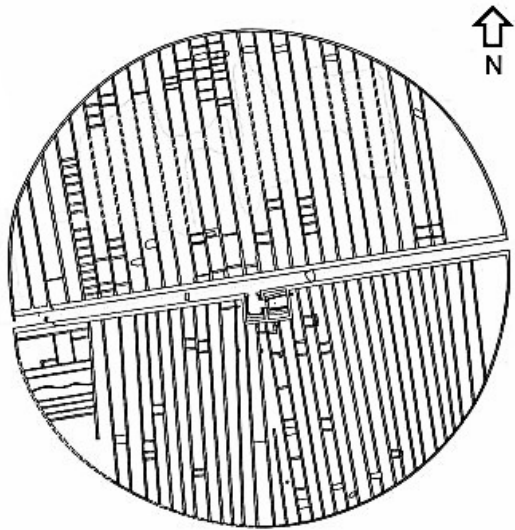
<sup>95</sup> Lobban R. (2004) *Historical Dictionary of Ancient and Medieval Nubia*, pp. 11, 12

<sup>96</sup> An important alchemical text, the *Turba Philosophorum* (*The Gathering of Philosophers*), compares the earth to an egg. The egg's shell was associated with the earth itself, the egg white with the water under the earth (“abyssal water”), the egg yolk with the central core or fire (“crater of rebirth”), and the seed at the center with the point of the sun (*punctus solis*). The astrological and alchemical symbol for the sun is the geometric figure of a circle with a dot at the center. The symbol speaks of the completion of a cycle, and it is also the symbol of the sun gods.

In most circumstances the bodies are found in a crouched position facing east, while in the Middle Kingdom the orientation of the head of the deceased was changed to west, thus confirming the hypothesis that the east and west points are seen as powerful points of transition (of birth, death and rebirth). As aforementioned, within the Sacred Quaternary the four cardinal directions correspond to the Four Moments of the Sun, with the top symbolizing the direction of north, the sun at noon, and the land of the living; the bottom the direction of south, the sun at midnight (The Black Sun), the realm of the dead and spirits; the right–end the direction of east, the sun at dawn, and the nascence of spirit/soul and earthly life in a cosmic cycle; and the left–end west, the sun at dusk, the movement from the living to the spirit world. Accordingly, offering places were most often placed on the west and south.

**Fig. 8:** plan of the great tumulus I11 at Kerma Credit: Société De Cultures Nubienne

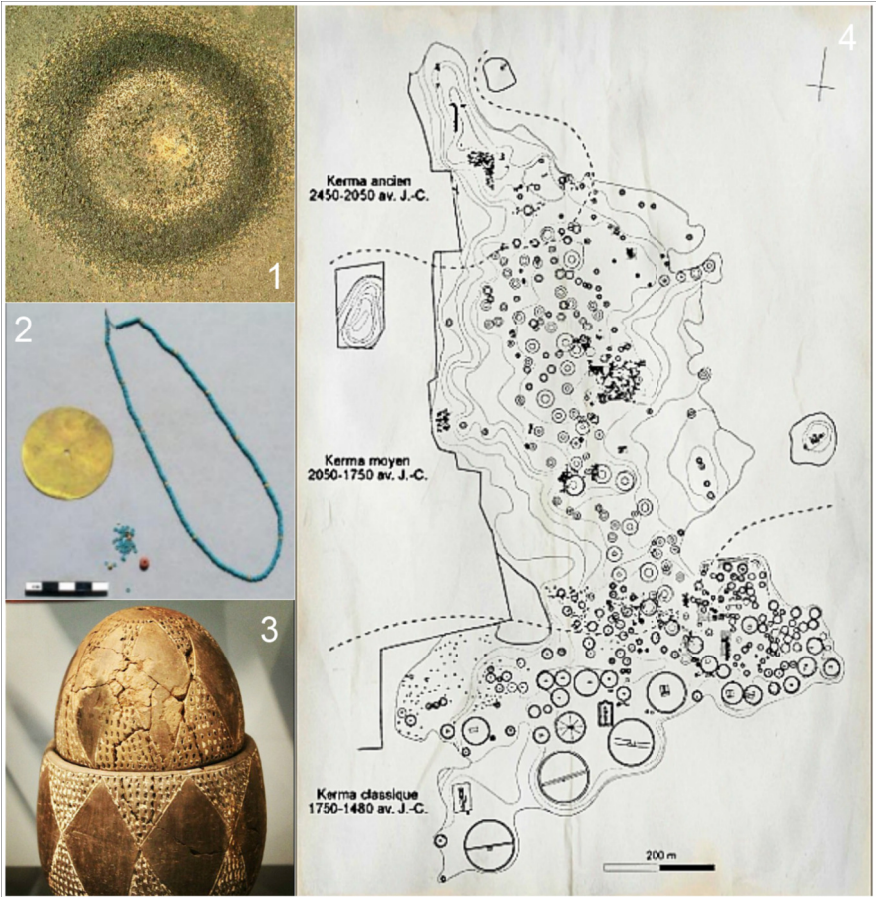
It is important to know that many circular superstructures at Kerma are designed according to the basic representations of the sacred circle mentioned on page 14 (Figure 3). The great tumuli at Kerma belonging to the classical period (1750–1450 BCE) make no exception. There are only eight examples of great tumuli at Kerma, which are approximately aligned at the southern edge of the cemetery. These structures are without parallel among the funerary monuments of Nubia, or anywhere else in the world. The largest of them is nearly a hundred meters (300 feet) in diameter, and its interior chambers are far more extensive than those of any Egyptian pyramid. The superstructure is divided by a long and continuous corridor that runs across the entire width of each mound, while the remaining walls and passages of the core–structure extend from it at right angles. The corridor divides the basic geometric form of a circle in two semi–circles, which represents a clear reference to the symbol of the Cosmic Egg present in many ancient cultures. This evidence is further supported by the fact that the construction of many tumuli at Kerma consisted in building the external rings of stones dark in colour, while the inner surface and sections of the mounds, often made of concentric circles, were filled with carefully selected white and yellow quartzite pebbles.<sup>97</sup>



<sup>97</sup> HUNE – Humboldt University Nubian Expedition 2008; [www2.hu-berlin.de/aknoa](http://www2.hu-berlin.de/aknoa)

Many ancient cultures compared the earth to an egg. The egg's shell was associated with the earth itself, the egg's white with the water under the earth ("abyssal water), the egg's yolk with the central core or fire ("crater of rebirth"), and the seed with the point of the sun (*punctus solis*).<sup>98</sup>

The Nubian tumuli appear explicitly patterned after both the egg and the earth – as womb – and the symbol of



the sun gods. The symbolic reference to the Cosmic Egg of early Nubian burial architecture and practice can therefore clearly be associated with the completion of a cycle of manifestation and the end of earthly life, as well as the belief in resurrection. A summary of evidence supporting these claims is presented in the set of pictures above<sup>99</sup>:

1. An aerial view of tumulus MOG034 shows a structure composed of concentric circles of different colours (mainly white and yellow). Its design is clear reference to the Cosmic Egg, or Primordial Egg, in which the “alchemical birth” takes place.
2. Artifacts recovered from graves at Kerma include a gold disk with a hole in the center. This golden artifact represents a clear reference to the Point of the Sun (*Punctus Solis*) where all opposites unite and where, according to Orphic teachings and other esoteric doctrines, the Great Work (*Opus Magnum*) is accomplished. It is the symbol of the sun gods and evidence that in ancient Nubia a monotheistic religion once existed.
3. Nubian pre-dynastic egg-shaped funerary vessel.
4. Map of the cemeteries and circular burial structures at Kerma, Sudan.

<sup>98</sup> Opsopaus J. (1999) *The Ancient Greek Esoteric Doctrine of the Elements: Fire*

<sup>99</sup> Photo credit: 1. Humboldt University Nubian Expedition 2008 2. Wolf Pawel and Ulkrike Nowotnik (2003/4) *The Third Season of the SARS Anglo-German Expedition to the Fourth Cataract of the Nile*, the Kerma Cemetery 3. Akhenatenator 4. Sociétés De Cultures Nubienne



The evidence that has emerged so far confirms without a doubt that the geometry of the Sacred Quaternary inspired the design of thousands of circular burial mounds throughout the Sudanese desert and ancient Nubia. However, the Sacred quaternary symbol's correspondence with physical structures goes much farther. The astonishing truth is that Africa's Sacred Quaternary design is the foundational geometrical design for all pyramids on Earth.

The Nubian tradition of building sacred structures in combination with African spiritual science will help us to unveil one of the latest mysteries in the field of pyramid architecture. To begin with, it will be presented as another example of archaeological analysis starting at the wrong end and running counter to logical thought process often encountered among archaeologists having a materialistic worldview. For some incomprehensible reason, the incredibly rich cosmological world of preindustrial, and even contemporary African societies that have preserved millennia-old traditions, are marginalized or simply excluded *a priori* by Western anthropologists and archaeologists. As a consequence, when new findings are made, what archaeologists don't understand, or don't want to understand, might be what's most important.



**Picture:** pyramid 232 at Sedeinga, Sudan – Courtesy: V. Francigny. <sup>100</sup>

A recent discovery made at the site of Sedeinga in Sudan revealed, along with graves, a cluster of 35 pyramids dating back approximately two thousand years when the kingdom of Kush flourished in ancient Nubia.

Among the discoveries was a pyramid designed with an inner circular structure connected to the pyramid corners through cross-braces. In some cases, the pyramids were designed only with a circular structure at the center, or with a simple intersection of two walls forming a cross within a square or rectangle structure. The various designs of these pyramids are wonderful examples of sacred geometrical patterns commonly found in African architecture, art, and religious iconography, going back in time as far as the dawn of human civilization.

<sup>100</sup> 35 Ancient Pyramids Discovered in Sudan Necropolis – LIVE SCIENCE, February 6, 2013

According to French archaeologists Claude Rilly and Vincent Francigny, who are credited for the discovery, the pyramid design resembles very much a “jardin à la française” (French formal garden).<sup>101</sup> To this date, however, the particular design and religious meaning of these pyramids remains a mystery to the archaeological orthodoxy, as well as to scholars engaged in the study of religions. Like the first European explorers who stepped onto African soil and refused to believe that indigenous Africans could have built the amazing structures of Great Zimbabwe <sup>103</sup>, French archaeologists today offer as a solution to the mystery of a millennia-old Nubian pyramid the example of a 17<sup>th</sup> century French formal garden.<sup>102</sup> Although the design of French formal gardens is based on symmetry and the principle of imposing order over nature, a satisfactory answer to the question of the origin of pyramid design will be found deeper in the heart of Africa, in Africa's indigenous cultural and spiritual traditions, which, as we have noted, have been subjected to repugnant marginalization: indeed, the same marginalization (underestimation, misrepresentation, and stigmatization) that have been reserved – and continue to be reserved – for non-white indigenous peoples and cultural heritages around the world.<sup>104</sup>

Western prejudice against black Africans is particularly acute in the area of spiritual traditions. Western science defines these traditions as the “most primitive” stage of spiritual evolution of peoples, dismissing them as “archaic,” “pagan,” “superstitious,” etc.<sup>105</sup> Only a few scholars in the West have had the courage or wisdom to recognize that there are myriad of sciences encoded the linguistic, architectural, and iconographic manifestations of indigenous cultures – ancient sciences on a par with, and sometimes exceeding the reach of, modern science. It is sad truth that the Western world has long left its saner, more grounding, traditions behind and has adopted an anti-nature attitude, even though living is the essence of human beings. Western society has transformed the world into an “object-oriented” (dead) society, which has necessarily fallen into spiritual misery. Nature and spirit are two sides of the same coin. Nature is spirit made manifest. Anti-nature means anti-spirit. However, modern reductionist science, has not succeeded in destroying a plethora of ancient evidence of the Great Spirit at work in Africa.

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<sup>101</sup> Archaeologists Found a Mysterious, Dense Cluster of 35 Pyramids in Sudan – Smithsonian Magazine

<sup>102</sup> Without substantial written historical records of what people in the past were thinking and believing, modern archaeologists, schooled in dismissal of all that does not exult Western culture, find it difficult to interpret artifacts without the bias of cultural biases inevitably influencing the results.

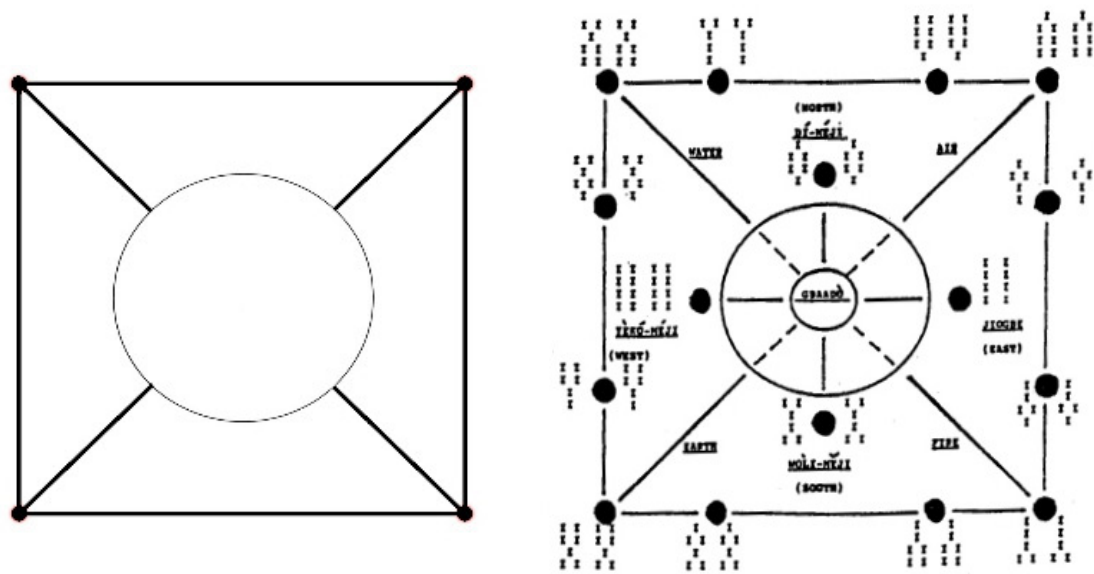
<sup>103</sup> King H. (2002) *Tracing the Way: Spiritual Dimensions of the World Religions*, p. 26

<sup>104</sup> Mezzana D. (2002) *African traditional religions and modernity*, Online Journal on African societies

<sup>105</sup> Lebron R. E. (2012) *Searching for Spiritual Unity... Can There Be A Common Ground?* p. 488

The Divine Code of Creation

In Nigeria, and also in most other Africans countries, a complex relationship exists between peoples and their natural environments, including, obviously, their larger cosmic environment. The Igbo and Yoruba have traditionally viewed human beings as being directly in the center of the universe, and therefore they always have regarded themselves as having a special relationship with the cosmos. The prevailing view in these cultures is that a fundamental and delicate balance exists in the universe between the manifest and unmanifest. This balance pertains to the ideas of the origin of the universe, its structure, and nature of the various forces that inhabit it.<sup>106</sup>



**Fig. 9:** Pyramid 232 at Sedeinga, characterized by an inner circular structure connected to the outer structure through cross-braces (left); the 16 Odu-Ifa chart of the Yoruba (right). Credit: Baba Medahochi

According to Yoruba cosmology, there are 16 primal energy patterns (*odu*) that string the universe together and also govern the earth. These 16 energy patterns, with 16 variations each, for a total of 256 combinations, denote the divine matrix, the consciousness that pervades all creation and governs every situation in life.<sup>107</sup> Each of the 256 energy patterns is linked to destiny through the symbolism of the number 16, which is the number of the cosmos representing the primal order that was issued from the unity of Olodumare, the most important state of existence regarded as being all-encompassing. The Odu-Ifa divination system also functions as an ancient binary numeral system involving the numbers 2, 4, 8, 16 etc., which can be translated into decimal numbers arranged in columns (Fig. 9). It far predates both modern computer technology and chaos theory.

<sup>106</sup> Udeani Ch. (2007) *Inculturation as Dialogue – Intercultural Theology and Study of Religions*

<sup>107</sup> Faseyin, Fawesagu A. Z. (2006) *IWAKERI: The Quest for African Spirituality*, pp. 115, 116



As mentioned earlier, in Africa the sacred union between the circle and the square is rigorously symbolic, summarizing the fundamental relationship between the spiritual world and the human terrestrial condition. This African concept of unity is often represented by geometrical figures like the equal-armed cross, the circle, the square, the rectangle, or the quaternary as a result of symmetrical arrangements of the number four and its multiples (4, 8, 16 etc.).

The circle within the square as a sacred symbol, commonly known as “mandala” (the ancient Sanskrit word for circle), is found not only in Africa but throughout the East and Medieval Europe. Specifically Christian mandalas, belonging to the Early Middle Ages, show Christ in the center, with the four evangelists, or their symbols, at the cardinal points. The father of analytical psychology, C. G. Jung, has already noticed that this conception is very old, because Horus was represented with his four sons in the same way by the Egyptians.<sup>108</sup>

However, archaeological evidence suggests that the Odu-Ifa already existed as early as 6000 BCE, antedating by at least three millennia the Egyptian cult of Horus, as well as Eight Deities of the Ogdoad.<sup>109</sup> William Bascom (1912–1981), a noted scholar of the Yoruba, as well as a leading anthropologist at University of California, Berkeley, brought to light evidence that demonstrates that the Yoruba were present 8000 BCE, which is 6000 years earlier than generally assumed.<sup>110</sup> This bolsters the theory that indigenous African cultures like the Igbo and the Yoruba were originators of cosmological and religious concepts found elsewhere in the world.

The specific design of the pyramid 232 at Sedeinga can be summarized in a few words. In the same way as the ancient esoteric traditions of Greek and Egypt, Nubian funerary architecture incorporates the symbolic maintenance of the cosmic order. The inner circle represents the Crater or Womb of Rebirth. The Crater is a place of ordeal, where truth and falsity are separated, and the soul of the deceased may drink from it or be immersed in it in order to be reborn. Four rivers converge in the Underworld, represented by four cross-braces, each associated with an element (earth, water, air, and fire). This fourfold Underworld geography is found in Greek mythology (Styx, Phlegethon, Acheron, and Cocytus), in the Hebrew Bible (Pishon, Gihon, Hiddekel, and Perat), and in all Eastern mythologies.

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<sup>108</sup> Jung C.G. (1875–1961) *Memories, Dreams Reflections*, Originally published under the title: “*Engineering, Träume und Gedanken*”.

<sup>109</sup> The first evidence of Horus worship appears in Egypt during the late Predynastic period c. 3100 BCE, while the 4 male and 4 female deities of the Ogdoad appear in the pyramid texts c. 2030–1640 BCE.

<sup>110</sup> King Spencer Ch. (2008) *Nature's Ancient Religion: Orisha Worship and Ifá*, p. 305

Furthermore, the 16 primal energy patterns of creation of the Yoruba correspond to the 16 Angels in Western hermetic tradition. These angels are integral to Enochian magic applied to the angelic language and celestial hierarchies recorded by the English alchemists John Dee and Edward Kelley in the late 16th century.<sup>111</sup> The structure of the Watchtowers Hierarchies is usually mapped to the four quadrants of the Great Table of Earth which includes: four Castles/Kings, four Horsemen/Clothes of Passages (assigned to the four Elements), and four Beasts/Crosses. In this structure, the 16 Angels are the greatest number explicated in the celestial hierarchy connecting the heavens to the earth.<sup>112</sup> The esoteric figures of the Enochian magic system can further be linked to the angelical system described in rabbinic literature of the four archangels Gabriel, Michael, Uriel and Raphael, who surround God's throne and are identified with the four holy creatures.<sup>113</sup> The four archangels standing at the four corners of the earth are also associated with the four rivers flowing out of the Garden of Eden.



We find the same symbolism in Byzantine, Gothic, and Christian iconography, in which the four evangelists appear as the four creatures that draw the chariot of God.<sup>114</sup>

As the Italian mural clearly demonstrates, the symbol assigned to the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) is of a design similar to the design of pyramid 232 at

Sedeinga. The 6<sup>th</sup> century mosaic from the Basilica of San Vitale in Ravenna, Italy, is one clear example of a religious tradition spanning more than five millennia and based on a much older cosmological concept.

<sup>111</sup> Burns T. and Moore J. A. (2010) *John Dee and Edward Kelly's Great Table* – Journal of the Western Mystery Tradition No. 19, Vol. 2 Autumnal Equinox 2010

<sup>112</sup>  $4 \times 1 = 4$  / the 4 Castles, 4 horsemen, 4 Beasts = 4 Kings, 4 Clothes of Passage, 4 Crosses etc.  $4 + 12 = 16$

<sup>113</sup> *Angels in the Talmud: Michael, Gabriel, Uriel and Raphael* – Jewish Heritage Online Magazine – Numbers Rabbah 2:10

<sup>114</sup> The Heavenly Throne; or heavenly Throne-Chariot, with special reference to Ezekiel.

The tetramorph in Christian symbolism was also promoted by Irenaeus, one of the most famous theologians of the early church of Greek origins, recognized as a saint by the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches. He stated all four evangelists must be present to get a complete picture of Jesus Christ.<sup>114</sup> To support his argument, he relied upon the presence of the four living creatures around the throne of God, as recorded in Revelations 4:6–7.



**Pictures:** Igbo traditional costume (*Okoro Omebe*) adorned with four fold symbols (left); symbol of the four evangelists according to Book of Kells (*Leabhar Cheanannais*) dating to the 8<sup>th</sup> century (right).

As with the Yoruba, the cosmos of the Igbo is rooted in the number four, and thus, the concept of time itself is rooted in the number four. There are four days in the Igbo week. The days are known as the four market days, named after the four fishmonger deities *eke*, *orie*, *afor* and *nkwo*. And by now we are not surprised to learn that these names are the root words for the four archangels we find in rabbinic literature: *Afor* for *Rafa-el*, *Eke* for *Mika-el*, *Orie* for *Uri-el*, and *Nkwo* for *Ga-briel* or *Ka-Briel/Kwa-Briel*.<sup>115</sup> Four is also the number of *Afa*, which is the universal Igbo language and divination system, as well as the indigenous lingua franca which originated the Yoruban word *Ifa* (the name of the God of Divination).<sup>116</sup> Thus, the evidence collected to this point leads us to believe that the Niger Valley civilization represents the mother culture of cosmological traditions, spiritual sciences, and religion found elsewhere and much later in the world.

<sup>114</sup> Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (c. AD 180) *Against Heresies* 3.11.8  
<sup>115</sup> Etymological information received from Catherine Acholonu during a discussion.  
<sup>116</sup> Adiele Afigbo (2005) *Igbo History and Society*— ed. Toyin Falola

*"Where I go, most scholars cannot follow me, but one day they will.  
I looked into a place where others dare not look,  
and found my place of awakening."*

- Nenad M. Djurdjevic

## Tracing the Origins of the Sacred Grail

The legend of the Sacred Grail, or Holy Grail, has been told and retold in various cultures and languages for hundreds of years. First mentioned in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century by French author Chrétien de Troyes in *Perceval: ou le Conte du Graal*,<sup>118</sup> the story of the legendary vessel and the quest to find it became increasingly popular during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Even today, the appeal of the quest is universal because the Grail has never been found or even unambiguously described. Ownership of the Grail has been attributed to various groups, mainly to the Knights Templar, because legend has it that the Grail is identical with the cup, seen in “Last Supper” paintings, that collected Christ's blood upon his removal from the Cross.<sup>119</sup>

However, theories abound as to where the Grail comes from, where it traveled, and where it ended up. One legend says that the Knights Templar took it from Jerusalem during the Crusades. Thereupon, we find “Grails” in several churches all across Europe.<sup>120</sup> Another theory says that the history of the Grail can be traced to the 11<sup>th</sup> century somewhere in the Middle-East,<sup>121</sup> while evidence presented by some scholars suggests that the origin of the grail legend lies in Celtic myth. Today, there are at least five known places that claim ownership of the Grail. Some researchers went even further by claiming that Jesus may not even have died on the Cross but lived to wed Mary Magdalene and father children whose Merovingian bloodline persists until this very day.<sup>122</sup>

While most Grail scholars and authors continue to struggle with the origins and symbology of the Grail, modern historians and archaeologists endeavour to discount the Grail as fiction. Historians like Richard Barber, author of *The Holy Grail: Imagination and Belief*, declared that the Grail stories are just that: stories.<sup>123</sup> He also defined Chrétien de Troyes as “a poet with a remarkable imagination who invents the idea of the Grail”.<sup>124</sup> Barber is backed by archaeologist Fred Hiebert who declared “...when it comes to linking any such object to a specific legend, we can't do it”.<sup>125</sup> In the meantime, National Geographic fellow Fred Hiebert keeps high his hopes of finding remains of ancient people, especially pottery or metal vessels. Alas, I was wondering if those two gentlemen ever have heard about the saying: “Where there's smoke, there's fire”.

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<sup>118</sup> Chrétien de Troyes (1180–1191 CE) *Perceval, ou le Conte du Graal* (Percival: the Story of the Graal)

<sup>119</sup> Robert De Boron (1191–1202 CE) *Joseph d'Arimathie*

<sup>120</sup> That is, the cathedral of Saint Mary in Valencia, Spain; the Rosslyn Chapel in Glastonbury, Scotland etc.

<sup>121</sup> Beltrán A. (1984) *Estudio sobre el Santo Cáliz de la Catedral de Valencia*

<sup>122</sup> Twyman T.R. (2004) *The Merovingian Mythos and the Mystery of Rennes-Le-Chateau*

<sup>123, 124, 125</sup> National Geographic (2013) *Holy Grail Legend Endures for Centuries*, by Richard A. Lovett



So, what is a “grail,” and why would anyone want it? Why, according to the legends about King Arthur, was it so highly prized by the Knights of the Round Table? Where did the symbolism of the Grail and the Round Table originate? What do the symbols represent? Let's begin with linguistics.

In earliest literary context, the word “grail” is derived through Old French “graal” or “greal” and from Latin “gradale” or “gradalis” (step-by-step) and refers to a type of dish or bowl made of earth, wood, or metal, served – course by course – at a Medieval banquet.<sup>126</sup> Curiously, Chrétien de Troyes refers to it as *un graal* (“a grail”), not as “the grail”. The Latin terminology, however, further derives from an earlier form, “garalis” or “cratalis,” from the Greek word “krater,” and the verb “kerannymi,” “to mix,” used to describe a two-handed shallow cup.<sup>127</sup>



**Pictures:** Mycenaean kylix from the cemetery of Lakkithra, c. 1200 BCE (left).<sup>128</sup> Funerary krater decorated with meander pattern; Geometric Period, from Kamiros, Rhodes, c. 800–700 BCE (right).<sup>129</sup>

Thus, the term “krater” (or crater) particularly refers to a mixing bowl, especially that in which wine is mixed with water for drinking during Hellenic rituals, and hence refers to the bowl-shaped volcanic crater known from Orphic doctrines. As explained in the previous chapter, according to Nubian thought, to be reborn one must either drink from or be immersed in the Crater or Womb of Rebirth. The only scholar who has theorized a connection between the Greek concept “krater” and the Grail legend is the British scholar of Presocratic philosophy Peter Kingsley.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>126</sup> Friedrich D. (1864) *An Etymological Dictionary of the Romance languages*, p. 236.

<sup>127</sup> William N. A. (1916) *Concerning the Word Graal, Greal, Modern Philology*, Vol. 13, No. 11

<sup>128</sup> Archaeological Museum of Argostoli, Greece <sup>129</sup> British Museum, Room 13: Greece 1050–520 BCE

<sup>130</sup> Kingsley P. (1995) *Ancient Philosophy, Mystery and Magic: Empedocles and Pythagorean Tradition*, p. 135 – Oxford University Press

Linguistics tells us that the ancient pronunciation of voiced and voiceless stops is interchangeable. For example, before Babylon got its name in the 7<sup>th</sup> century it was known as “Sanhara” to Mitannis and “Sangara” to Egyptians. With “g” and “k” being interchangeable, it means that it could have been called “Sankara” as well. In the earliest Latin and Greek terminology, the letters “c” and “k” were used to represent the two consonants “k” and “g,” respectively, and these were not differentiated in writing. Therefore, “crater” also occurs with “k,” pronounced “krater”. Accordingly, the word “krater” can be linked to the Igbo expression *kara ala* or *akara ala*, meaning “The Symbol of the Earth,” or “The Word or Writing of the Earth,” as in Nsibidi (*nsi* means earth, *biri* means writing). Ala is the Earth Mother Goddess, while *gara ala* means “Adventure through the Bowels of the Earth or Labyrinths”.<sup>130</sup> Ala and Gara, in addition to their symbolical meanings, etymologically correspond to Hera, the Greek goddess associated by Empedocles with Earth. Hera, in exactly the same way as Ala and Gara, is responsible for fertility and birth. Thus, the sacred vessel has been conceived as the abode of the earth goddess and “Her Conglomerate of Secrets”<sup>131</sup> or, as Hellenic rituals teach us, the bowl that consecrates the Holy Water (Greek, *Hudôr Theion*) or water inflamed by the sacred fire (Latin, *Aqua Igne Sacra*).<sup>132, 133</sup>



**Picture:** Orthodox Christian icon of *The Last Supper*

Thus, the legendary vessel can be understood as the primary symbol of female power, based on the notion of woman as container. Such a ritual vessel is known among the Yoruba as *Agere-Ifa*, meaning “Divination Cup” or “Divine Container”.<sup>134</sup> Likewise, the terms “grail” or “gradale” are meant to refer to the Sacred Holy Grail. This also implies that the symbolism of the Sacred/Holy Grail – when said it was used by Jesus during the Last Supper (picture above) – or could give to whomever drank from it eternal life (cf. resurrection), might well be older than generally assumed. But if so, where did the legend of the Grail first originate?

<sup>130, 131</sup> Information received from Professor Catherine Acholonu while writing this paper.

<sup>132</sup> Empedocles, an initiate in the ancient Orphic mystery tradition, says that the Sacred/Volcanic/Solar or Central Fire was born in the bowels of the earth. Thus, symbolically speaking, the Sacred Fire and Holy Water establish a direct link between the Christic Energy and the Blood of Christ, both kept in the bowl-shaped crater. <sup>133</sup> Opsopaus J. (1999), *The Crater* – Biblioteca Arcana

<sup>134</sup> Thompson Drewal M. (1992), *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*, p. 181

*Agere* means “container,” while *Ifa* is the name of the divination god; and hence the cup is a symbol of God's divine grace.





**Pictures:** examples of Yoruba divination bowls, with four interior divisions connected to an inner circular core, show the same design as pyramid 232 at Sedeinga, Sudan (left); example of divining cup Agere-Ifa, held up by four female deities (right). Courtesy: Hamill Gallery, Boston MA © 2013

In Ifa divination, a central ritual within Yoruba religion that originated from Igbo Afa <sup>135</sup>, the 16 sacred palm nuts associated with the 16 male “odu” kept in Agere-Ifa establish a metaphoric relationship between the male and female principles. According to a legend passed on through oral tradition, Agere was a divination deity's wife who hid her husband inside her stomach in order to protect him. Thus, the carved wooden ritual container that holds the 16 male palm nuts is considered female wood in which the deity abides. For the same reason, most diviners argue that images carved on Agere should be female. <sup>136</sup>

Sculptors, however, have flexibility in what they choose to carve, often depicting the god Obatala (Igbo Eri) on horseback or other animals, so that there seems to be a discontinuity of meaning. But, also in such cases, the symbolic language of the ancients is subjected to interpretation and requires an analysis based on elements found in Yoruba and Igbo mythologies.

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<sup>135</sup> As Catherine Acholonu explains, Ifa is in three forms – the written prehistory of the gods and ancestors of Yoruba and Igbo before their separation as two tribes. It is also the book of instructions on traditional worship by the god Orunmila (Thoth/Igbo Eri/Obatala).

Ifa also means the Art of Divination per se. This art has a specialist lexicon of 256 words and word-combinations only used by Ifa diviners. Afa is the Igbo equivalent of Ifa as divination.

<sup>136</sup> Thompson Drewal M. (1992) *Yoruba Ritual – Performers, Play, Agency*, p. 181

In Yoruba religion, it is possible to distinguish different classes of divinities, such as deified and primordial divinities, as well as female goddesses that are manifestations of the personification of natural phenomena like rivers. Female deities associated with the element of water representing the four major Nigerian rivers, including the “river of rivers,” Niger, are Ayelala, Oya, Otin and Orosen. According to myth, these four river deities hold the primordial water used by Oris'Nla (Obatala/Igbo Eri) to soften the clay with which the physical figures of humans were fashioned.<sup>137</sup>



**Picture:** Yoruba divination bowl with four interior divisions connected to an inner circular core; depicting the four primordial rivers of creation and the underworld. Courtesy: Hamill Gallery, Boston MA © 2013

This means that the sacred Agere cup held up by the four river deities contains the primordial waters of creation from which all life arose. Thus, the Agere–Ifa, in exactly the same way as the Holy Grail, is the cup that holds the Water of Life and hence the very essence of life, in modern times associated with the Blood of Christ.

In local folklore, Osun is the Yoruba word meaning “Water of Life”. Osun is the river goddess responsible for the fertility of the land and fecundity of women, as well as for health and healing. The goddess Osun who heals, in the broadest sense, anyone who partakes of her waters. Agere–Ifa is considered one of the essential ritual symbols used by divination priests during traditional healing practices.<sup>138</sup> Female imagery on artistic representations of Agere–Ifa provides visual clues to the power of women and their vital role in society in creating balance and harmony.

In light of this evidence, it can be suggested that the supernatural healing properties attributed to the Sacred Holy Grail in Western tradition directly descend from African indigenous religion and healing practices. Below, we explore the ancient African foundation for the Medieval tale of the healing of the Fisher King and his lands, a tale which, until now, has never been given a satisfactory historical explanation.

<sup>137</sup> Olayubu O. (2003) *Women in the Yoruba religious sphere*, p. 78  
<sup>138</sup> African Journal, Volume 14 (1987) Africana Publishing Company, p. 151

According to ancient African mythological narratives, the Yoruba traditional healing system was given to the people by Orunmila, the founder of Ifa divination. He is thus credited with being the father of traditional healing, to have given names to all plants and classified them according to their medicinal properties. Orunmila was a spiritual herbalist, able to heal illnesses caused by physical factors as well as by evil spirits.<sup>139</sup> He is one of the earliest deities in the Yoruba pantheon of Orishas, sent down from heaven with 15 other divinities by the Supreme Being Olodumare.<sup>140</sup> Orunmila's name is derived by Ifa diviners from an earlier name of Ifa, namely Ela. Ela's first incarnation on earth was a God-man known to the Yoruba as the “Redeemer and Savior”. This redeemer/saviour connection existed long before the European influx to Africa.



**Picture:** chalice excavated at Igbo-Ukwu is the exact shape of the Sumerian letter UDU/DU. Udu means ritual pot or medicine pot in Igbo. Courtesy: Catherine Acholonu

Etymologically, the term Ela implies in Igbo “Ele,” the male aspect of Ela or God of the aboriginal forest dwellers, said to be sent by the God of the universe to redeem the earth from the Evil One. Ifa says that Orunmila (Obatala/Igbo Eri) came into the world as Second in the Order of Ela (Igbo Ele/Hebrew El).<sup>141</sup>

If we add to Agere the name Ele or Ela, which means “First Son of God who was sent into the world to banish the Evil One” in Igbo and Yoruba, respectively, then we have Agere-Ele, meaning “Divine/Sacred Drinking Cup of Ele”. Thus, Agere-Ele is Gra-il or Gra-al.<sup>142</sup>

Thus we find that the Grail is the symbol for the God. All those of God's lineage who come into the world as receptacles for the god-force receive it and pour it forth that the world may be sated. “As above, so below”.<sup>143</sup> The God in question being androgynous but more of a Mother (Mother Earth), this Cup/Pot/Vase, which belonged to her was also a natural property of her Son Ele – the Earth God/Amun.<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Akin Ademuwagun Z. (1979) *African therapeutic systems*, p. 96

<sup>140</sup> Orisha is the foundation of Ifa and considered god's essence in nature (*ori* means “head,” *sha* “source”)

<sup>141, 142</sup> Information emerged during a discussion on Grail etymology with prof. Catherine Acholonu.

<sup>143, 144</sup> Acholonu C. and Davis S. (2013) *Eden in Sumer on the Niger: Archaeological, Linguistic and Recorded Evidence of 450,000 Years of Atlantis, Eden and Sumer in West Africa*

## The Story of a Fish who became King

In the African precolonial civilizations natural herbs, plants, animal parts and minerals would have been used to treat most illnesses. Also in modern times the use of plant and animal resources in natural healing practices remains widespread among African traditional medicine practitioners. Recent studies on the littoral tribes of the Western Niger Delta of Nigeria published in the European Scientific Journal (ESJ), indicated that herbal mixtures with fish derivatives and other natural ingredients were the most prescribed and popular medicine among indigenous people from time immemorial.<sup>145</sup>

Prior to the introduction of Western medicine, traditional societies survived the menace of various diseases using traditional nature-based medicines.<sup>146</sup> In the littoral societies of Africa, the sap or oils of certain seeds, roots, and plants were known to possess curative properties in the treatment of various illnesses. Ethnomedicinal research performed by Nigerian universities has shown that the widespread use of fish meat mixed with other ingredients in traditional healing practices has had positive effects on the health of past and present-day indigenous communities.

Among a variety of marine and freshwater fish species having medicinal value, the mud-fish is used in various complex traditional medicine regimens to treat various ailments. It is also a precious food source of livelihood, because even in the dry season, when there's little to eat, it can be dug out from hardened-mud river bed. Mud-fish have an amazing ability to survive dry seasons for several months, in places other fish can't. During the dry season, the mud-fish burrows into the mud at the bottom of the river as it loses water, and then goes into a state similar to hibernation, which is seen by local people as death. When the rainy season arrives and the rivers fill up, the mud-fish exits hibernation and begin to swim again, "reborn." This is seen as an example of resurrection, and therefore the mud-fish is used as a symbol of resurrection and eternal life. The seemingly supernatural act of a fish crossing dry land to new waters is perceived as a divine achievement, and thus the mud-fish and the element of water are linked together and are both seen to have considerable powers of healing, including the ability to renew and rebirth.<sup>147</sup> Because of its ability to exist on land as well in water, the "immortal" mud-fish is symbolic of the Two Worlds, the natural and the spiritual, as well as symbolic of a bridge between them.

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<sup>145, 146</sup> Ehinmore O. M. and Ogunude S. A. (2013) *Fish in indigenous healing practices among the Ilaje of coastal Yorubaland of Nigeria: A Historical Perspective* – European Scientific Journal , May 2013 edition vol. 9, No. 14

<sup>147</sup> Drewal H. J. (2008) *Mami Wata: Arts for Water Spirits in Africa and Its Diasporas*, p. 44



**Picture:** Agere-Ifa with mud-fish (*Egedu*); symbolizing the principle of immortality – Courtesy: Michael Backman Ltd. London © 2013

The mud-fish occupies a prominent position in the mythology and folklore of both the Yoruba and the Benin people. The mud-fish is one of the most frequent motifs associated with the first King of Ife, Oduduwa, and the androgynous divinity Olokun, considered “The Ruler of Fishes”, as well as with the Oba (King) of Benin.<sup>148</sup> Oduduwa is a sky-being (*orun*), and his name means “King of the World” or “Leader of the World,” for this was when the world spoke one language. The Benin and Yoruba and Igbo have the same origin through the sky-being, who landed in Igboland after the Deluge destroyed the world.<sup>149, 150</sup>

According to ancient African myth, at some point during Oduduwa's lifetime, after his descent from heaven to earth, his sons were given crowns and sent away to found kingdoms. This exodus has been described in one account as occurring when the land was plagued by drought and dry season.<sup>151</sup> This part of the legend corresponds with the life of the mud-fish, which, as we have seen, is able to survive long periods of time out of water and cross the land in search for new waters. In Yoruba religion, the symbolic act of exodus as drought takes hold is seen as a process of initiation, referred to as the “Search for the Ocean Water”.

Summarizing the aforementioned, it appears to be no coincidence that legendary figures like Oduduwa and Olokun, as well as Yoruba and Benin kings, are associated with the mud-fish. As a symbol of immortality, the mud-fish is depicted on artworks in ivory, bronze bracelets, royal objects, palace and shrine doors, water vessels and ritual containers, as well as divination cups. As the given evidence suggests, the supernatural healing properties of the Grail, and especially its ability to bestow immortality on the drinker of its waters, originated in African mythological and religious traditions.

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<sup>148</sup> Oduduwa is known among Igbo as *Idu Eri*, while in Benin he is called *Idu*.

<sup>149</sup> Acholonu C. and Davis S. (2013) *Eden in Sumer on the Niger: Archaeological, Linguistic and Recorded Evidence of 450,000 Years of Atlantis, Eden and Sumer in West Africa*.

<sup>150</sup> Today historians are trying to separate Benin origins from Yoruba and Igbo origins because of “clannish politics,” but that is a red herring, as the works of Catherine Acholonu clearly demonstrate.

<sup>151</sup> Smith R. S. (1988) *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, Third Edition, p. 14



The association of the human figure with mud-fish legs – yes, these fish do have legs – is best known from the royal arts of the Kingdom of Benin. The fish-legged Oba represents one of the most potent images of divine kingship, symbolizing the king's indivisible relationship with the androgynous sea deity Olokun. According to some authors, the mud-fish-legged figures refer specifically to Oba Ohen, who ruled Benin in the early 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>152</sup> It is said that Ohen suffered paralysis of both legs, trying to hide his disability from the eyes of people. Consequently, his son Ewuare, whose original name is Ogun, a name given to the god of iron and war, wished to commemorate his father in brass, depicting his father with mud-fish legs in order to disguise his deformity.<sup>153</sup>

However, prominent mythological figures with disabilities are also known from Yoruba theological accounts. It is said that Orunmila's younger brother, Osanin, had a lame leg, a paralyzed arm, and was blind in one eye. One day Orunmila (Obatala/Igbo Eri) asked Osanin to weed a garden. But, instead of doing the work, Osanin started crying. When Orunmila asked him why he was crying, Osanin replied that all the weeds he was asked to destroy were useful for curing diseases. He then identified many herbs and their medicinal uses. Since then, the Yoruba have regarded all medicinal herbs as *Ewe Osanin* (“Leaves of Osanin”).<sup>154</sup>

Interestingly, the literary character of the mysterious Fisher King, thought to have originated in Chrétien de Troyes' *Perceval*, reveals him to be a king who is infirm. Although the character is not represented uniformly in every text, and versions of the story vary widely, the Fisher King is always wounded in the legs, thighs or groin, and incapable of moving on his own. While he suffers as an individual, his kingdom suffers as he does, and his weakness affects the fertility of the land, reducing it to a barren wasteland.<sup>155</sup>

The Fisher King is first encountered when Percival meets a fisherman who offers him lodging. In his castle, the fisherman reveals himself to be a king who is weak and bedridden, and yet has such an abundance of wealth that he can entertain his guest with a grand feast. During the feast, Percival witnesses a Grail Procession but fails to ask his host the necessary questions in order to heal the Fisher King, such as, “who does the Grail serve?” and “What is the meaning of the Bleeding Lance?” As a result, all the inhabitants of the castle, including the King, disappear the next morning.<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Buller Fagg W. (1970) *Divine kingship in Africa* – British Museum, Dept. of Ethnography

<sup>153</sup> Borgatti J. & Brilliant R. (1990) *Likeness and beyond: portraits from Africa and beyond*, p. 65

<sup>154</sup> Abimbola K. (2005) *Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account*, p. 125

<sup>155, 156</sup> Chrétien de Troyes (12<sup>th</sup> cent.) *The Complete Romances of Chrétien de Troyes* – transl. Staines D.

Chrétien's account of the Fisher King is not the only one of its kind. The Yoruba, like other Nigerian and African tribes, have a tradition of storytelling that is thousands of years old. The abundant animal resources of the African continent served people over the long period of their existence, and animal tales have inevitably inspired daily life and the culture of African peoples since time immemorial.

Before people in the Niger valley began to be engaged in farming and metal working, inland capture fisheries were considered to be of utmost importance in sustaining the livelihoods of rural communities, making the fish one of the earliest creatures found in folktales.<sup>157</sup>

In one of these tales, derived from Yoruba folklore known as “The Secret of the Fishing Baskets,” it is said that, across a certain river, a poor fisherman set a row of stakes, and on each stake he fastened a basket in which he hoped to trap fish. But his luck was very bad, and he was disappointed to find that he caught no fish. One day, he found a stranger lying asleep on the river-bank. Instead of chasing away the stranger, the fisherman spoke kindly to him and invited him to share his evening meal. The stranger appeared very pleased and ate and drank, but did not speak a single word. Suddenly the stranger vanished, and only the remains of the meal convinced the fisherman that he had not been dreaming. The next evening, when the fisherman went to empty his baskets, he was astonished to find them overflowing with fish. On the day after, and on the third day, the baskets were full again. On the third day, when the fisherman came to the last basket, he saw that it contained a single monstrous fish. “Don't you know me?” said the fish. “Indeed no, Mr. Fish. I have never seen you before!” replied the fisherman. “Have you forgotten the stranger whom you treated so courteously?” said the fish. “It was I, and I am the King of the fishes. I am grateful for your kindness and intend to reward you.” Then the fish jumped into the river with a great splash. In the coming days, the fishing-baskets were full every evening, and the fisherman became prosperous.<sup>158</sup>

The “monstrous” fish captured by the fisherman is likely a mud-fish, whose aspect corresponds with Oba's terrifying aspect when portrayed as a human figure having mud-fish legs. The imagery of the Oba also combines motifs that emphasize his military power and spiritual aspects. The mud-fish is also associated with Olokun, the sea-god/goddess of the Yoruba, born of the primordial heaven. Olokun is known as the “ruler of the fishes,” who we see has been identified as the King of the Fishes.

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<sup>157</sup> Breunig P. *The 8000-year-old dugout canoe from Dufuna (NE Nigeria)*, G. Pwiti and R. Soper (eds.), *Aspects of African Archaeology. Papers from the 10th Congress of the PanAfrican Association for Prehistory and related Studies*. University of Zimbabwe Publications (Harare 1996) 461–468.

<sup>158</sup> Ogumefu M. I. (2010) *Yoruba Legends*, pp. 61, 62, 63



It becomes increasingly evident that the most important Arthurian romance of Western literary tradition, *Percival, the Story of the Grail*, written by Chrétien de Troyes in the late 12<sup>th</sup> century, shares a number of striking similarities with Nigerian indigenous mythological narratives and is, without doubt, based in African cosmology and theology. But for the reader familiar with Christian theology, the Yoruba legend of *The Secret of the Fishing Baskets* reveals much more than just a link between African and Western Grail legends. It contains many elements of one of the most important Biblical stories related to the life of Jesus, popularly known as the “Miraculous Catch of Fish”.<sup>159</sup>

Luke 5:1–5, describes the famous story of Jesus Christ who appears to his disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee after his resurrection from the dead, and gives them the miraculous power to catch a large number of fish. In Yoruba folklore, a fisherman meets a stranger on the river-bank and invites him to share his evening meal (We have a similar story, by the way, in the Medieval story of Parsifal who meets a fisherman along the river shores who offers him lodging and meal).

Similarly Jesus, “the fisher of men,” meets his disciples at the edge of a body of water. The newly resurrected Jesus invites his disciples to join him to eat breakfast: a breakfast of fish that Jesus has miraculously allowed the fishermen to catch. During the breakfast (Verses 10 – 14), the disciples eat with Jesus, eating some of the fish that they had miraculously caught. During the meal, none of the disciples dare to ask Jesus who he is, in exactly the same way that Parsifal fails to ask the Fisher King the necessary questions during the feast at the Grail Castle.

At the beginning of the story (John 21:1–5), the Bible says that Jesus stood early in the morning on the shore but his disciples did not recognize Him. Some scholars speculate that the disciples, while they were in fishing boats out on the water, may not have been able to see Jesus clearly because of the distance. But that's very unlikely, since they were able to hear his voice and follow his instructions while throwing their nets. The same scenario is encountered in the stories of the Fisher King and King of fishes.

Only at Grail Castle, the fisherman reveals himself to be the Fisher King, while the King of fishes reveals himself only the evening after the meal, rewarding the fisherman with baskets full of fish. In the face of evidence, the story of the miraculous catch of fish as well the character of Jesus are directly linked to the Fisher King and the King of Fishes. Although the fish symbol was used by early Christians, Greeks, Romans and almost all ancient Eastern mystery traditions, only African indigenous mythological accounts will provide satisfactory explanations of the Medieval saga of the Sacred Grail.

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<sup>159</sup> The Bible, see Gospel of John 21:1–14 – *The Miraculous Catch of Fish*

Evidence linking Biblical accounts on the miracles of Jesus and the Medieval character of the Fisher King with Nigerian creation myths does not end here. Based on the earliest oral traditions recorded by various scholars, the Igbo are the earliest inhabitants of the Southeastern region of Nigeria on both banks of the river Niger. In one of the accounts of their origins, it is said that before they settled in Igboland they were cave dwellers who emerged from the underworld and brought with them the concept of Nri as a holy city linked to Ala, the Earth goddess and Goddess of Fertility.<sup>160</sup>

This event took place after Eri, the first Nri King and ancestor of all Nri people, was sent down from the sky by Chukwu to rule over his people and to feed them. Upon his arrival, Eri sailed down a river in the underwater world and established in a place with mythical powers.<sup>161</sup> While Eri lived in that place, he and his kinship was fed by Chukwu with Azu-Igwe (“Fish from Heaven”). But when this special food ceased, for the sake of feeding his people, Eri created yam, ukwa (bread fruit tree) and all other foods, and controlled the earth that grows them. Myth has it also that four fish traders with baskets full of fish came to assist Eri on his supernatural mission to feed his people. Their names are *Eke, Orie, Afo* and *Nkwo*, the four deities who established the four market days in Igbo tradition.

Interestingly, the legend of Eri shows striking similarities to the story of Jesus feeding miraculously five thousand people.<sup>162</sup> Matthew 14:13–21 describes how Jesus withdrew by boat to a solitary place. When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.<sup>163</sup>

As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, “This is a remote place, and it’s already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food.” Jesus replied, “They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat”.

“We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish.” they answered. “Bring them here to me,” he said. And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven <sup>164</sup>, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. They all ate and were satisfied.

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<sup>160</sup> Iroegbu E. P. (2010) *Healing Insanity: A Study of Igbo Medicine in Contemporary Nigeria*, pp. 110,111

<sup>161</sup> According to several scholars the river in question is Anambra (“Ezu-na-Omambala”), while the place of Eri's settlement is the city of Aguleri.

<sup>162</sup> Holy Bible – New International Version (1973) Matthew 14:13–21 *Jesus Feeds The Five Thousand*

<sup>163</sup> It is well to remember that the God-man Eri (Orunmila/Obatala) are given the attributes of King, Priest, Teacher, Deity, Doctor/Healer and Savior.

<sup>164</sup> The Bible refers to it as “The Bread of Life,” or “Food from Heaven”

The legend of Eri tells us that at that time most of the lands were only morass. This did not please Eri, whom we find sitting on an ant heap sticking out above of the swamp land. Eri asks Chukwu for help. In response, Chukwu sends a blacksmith from Awka to dry up the land, and the blacksmith dries up the land with charcoal, fire, and bellows.<sup>165</sup>

The hypothesis that mythological accounts of Eri reflect true historical events in the distant past is supported by recent radiocarbon dating of samples of slag and bloom from ancient industrial furnaces in Lejja, Nsukka in Igboland.<sup>166</sup> According to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka Archaeology Department, the samples sent to dating labs in the U.K. returned with the surprising date of 4,000 BCE.<sup>167</sup> It means that Igbo people were making metal in industrial furnaces and piling up masses of slag and bloom in a time when the Sumerian and Egyptian civilizations were just beginning their journeys in the ancient world.

Igbo blacksmiths are traditionally associated with spiritual powers. Among a wide range of items produced by Igbo blacksmiths we find protective amulets, charms, iron-pots, cups, arrows, sacrificial knives, efficient agricultural tools, etc. Improved weapons such as swords and spears were manufactured only for the King's army. Since weapons are believed to represent positive powers conferred to man by the gods, the notion of mysterious, magical and miraculous weapons wielded by heroes with god-like traits and abilities is a common theme in African myth.

A dominant position among sacred weapons in African legend is occupied by the spear. The spear is symbolically associated with several deities who possess the power to create the human beings. One of these is Ogun, the chief god of iron workers in Benin. Another is Obatala, the creator of the physical world in Yoruba legend. In African sacred art, these divine characters are usually portrayed as equestrian, spear-bearing soldiers. The ancient African tradition of blacksmith hand work, in combination with the artistically rendered divine figure of Obatala, will be important in creating a fuller understanding of the origins of both Percival and the Fisher King.

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<sup>165</sup> Awka is the traditional home of the Igbo blacksmiths. The Awka smiths are famous for having traveled to distant places to ply their trade.

<sup>166</sup> It is worthwhile to mention that anthropological research performed by Professor Angulu M. Onwuejeogwu, a notable scholar of Igbo culture, suggests that the political organization for the Igbo-Ukwu bronzes was born under Eri's rule, at a place near Aguleri. Onwuejeogwu's conclusions appear to coincide with the oldest mythological narratives. Onwuejeogwu M.A. (1997), *The Principles of Ethnogeneachronology: Dating Nri (Igbo) Oral Tradition*

<sup>167</sup> See E.E. Okafor *Lejja Bloombank Revisited* Nigeria Heritage: Journal of the NCMM, Vol. 7, 1998

## The Alchemy of Godship and Knighthood

A large array of etymological hypotheses have been postulated for “Percival,” the Knight of the Round Table and the hero who would heal the Fisher King and restore the Wasteland to fertility. Since the first appearance of the character in *Conte du Graal*, the name “Percival” has had alternate spellings, such as “Perceval,” “Percevaus,” “Pierceval,” “Parceval,” “Parzival,” and “Parsifal”.<sup>168</sup> Standard etymology tells us that the name derives from Old French *Perce-Val* (lit. “valley-piercer”), as a conjunction of the verb *percer* (“to pierce/drill/penetrate”) and the word *val* (“valley”), thus meaning “piercing the valley,” or “to pierce the valley,” or “one who pierces the valley”.



**Picture:** Percival by Heraclius (Jean-Luc Leguay). Percival holds the Sacred Grail. At his sides we see the Bleeding lance and Holy Sponge.

However, if we take into consideration that the whole Arthurian legend is basically a parable of “sowing and reaping,” as paraphrased by Chrétien de Troyes in the opening of his prologue<sup>169</sup>, then the metaphorical language of “piercing the valley” can be understood literally as “piercing the soil,” an agricultural practice of placing seeds below the soil surface. Percival is associated with the Christian notion of the “Lord of the harvest”. It is therefore possible to identify Percival as the sower and therefore as a vital part of an agricultural process that leads a sufficient yearly harvest that can maintain the health of the tribe.

In Igbo traditional agriculture, modified versions of the spear have been used since the prehistoric era for easy piercing of the soil.<sup>170</sup> In African myth, spear-bearing deities have many variations. In Igbo legend, the spear-bearing equestrian deity Obatala (Igbo Eri) transformed the land into a fertile garden. In some mythological accounts, the spear is symbolic of giving birth to children and plays an important role in bringing fertility to the land.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Ashley M. (2005) *The Mammoth Book of King Arthur*

<sup>169</sup> Chrétien conflates the Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:3–23, Mark 4:3–20, Luke 8:5–15) with II Corinthians 9:6 (used in line 1) – “He who sows little reaps little. He who wishes to reap well casts his seed where God will increase his fruit a hundred-fold; for good seed withers and dies in worthless soil.”

<sup>170</sup> Nwonwu Francis O. W. (2010) *Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Igbo Traditional Culture*, p. 212

<sup>171</sup> Stanton J., Parker J., and Mills A. (2003) *Mythology: Myths, Legends, and Fantasies*, pp. 309–312

Oral tradition says that Eze-Nri, the first son of Eri and King of Nri, is the ruler who introduced agriculture to Igboland. Eze-Nri was also recognized as the priestly-chief of the earth goddess Ala, the most prominent and most worshiped deity in Igboland. Ala, however, couldn't exist on its own. She was created by Chukwu (*Chi-ukwu*), or Chineke, the Igbo names for the Supreme Being, or God the Creator. The prefix “chi-” is said to refer to the spirit that created all that exists above the earth, on earth, and under the earth, including the deities and other spirits.<sup>172</sup>

Par-Ce-V-Al can be therefore read as Igbo *Opara-Chi-Vu-Ala* (meaning “The First Son of God,” or “Bearer of the Earth”: as in Atlas who bears the earth on his shoulders). *Opara* means “Lord, King,” “Heir, First Son”; *Chi* means “Spirit, God, Holy Spirit”; *Vu* means “to bear, carry”; *Ala* means “Earth,” and it also means *El*, which means the Earth-dwelling God.<sup>173</sup>

There are several other elements in the story of Eri, as well as in the Yoruba mythological narrative, that are found in Chrétien's novel of the Grail. One of these is the substance of charcoal. As mentioned in the account of Eri's arrival on earth, Chukwu sent a blacksmith from Awka to dry up the land with charcoal, fire, and bellows, to make the swamp land habitable. As mentioned, because of their prominent role in Igbo cosmology, blacksmiths held some of the highest political and spiritual authority, and much of their work involved the production of ritual objects, of which many conceptualized imagery of fertility, sexuality, and reproduction.

Blacksmiths, however, were also feared and respected for their ability to communicate with tree spirits, necessary for making charcoal. In Nigeria many trees are said to be inhabited by the spirits of the dead, and these trees are held to be sacred and are not cut down. Blacksmiths are therefore considered mediators between man and the spirit world. The blackness of charcoal (specifically in the form of powdered charcoal) is considered a symbol of impurity, sterility and death.<sup>174</sup>

In Nigeria, but also elsewhere in West Central Africa, the tripartite colour classification in religious system relates generally to the colours white, red, and black. White is largely considered the colour of life, purity, health, and is associated with the female principle. Red, on the other hand, has connections with power, fire, the sun, and the male principle. Black stands for death. But it also stands for symbolic or ritual death, which is positive. So symbolically black is a two-sided coin.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>172</sup> Okoh M. (2010) *Fostering Christian Faith in Schools and Christian Communities Through Igbo Traditional Values*, p. 34

<sup>173</sup> Information obtained during a discussion with Catherine Acholonu

<sup>174</sup> Porteous A. (2002) *The Forest in Folklore and Mythology*, p. 167

<sup>175</sup> ASAC (1966) *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion*, pp. 47-63

**Picture:** Percival portrayed riding a horse with three heads: one white, one red, and one black. He is carrying the Grail high in his left hand, and while holding a sword in his right. Credit: R. J. TIBAUD

Black, red, and white, are the most frequent colours encountered in Yoruba sacred arts, religious rituals, ancestor veneration, and mythological narrative. Each of these colours is used to express specific beliefs and ideas, to identify the various gods and goddesses in the Yoruba pantheon, and to communicate with the spirit world. As such they are sacred.



Black, sometimes combined with red or white, is the favorite colour of Eshu, a divinity known for his tricky character. Like other trickster gods, Eshu is benevolent, but can also cause misfortune. He is both a messenger and a mediator between the gods and men. On more than one occasion, Eshu has been known to play tricks on Obatala, the creator god, usually portrayed as a white-haired old man in white robes. In one of these stories, Obatala went on a journey to meet his friend Shango, god of thunder and lightning. On his way, he met Eshu, sitting by the road with a large pot with red palm oil. Eshu asked Obatala to help him to lift the pot up on his head and, when Obatala complied, Eshu poured the oil on Obatala's head. Obatala, however, did not complain but went to the river, washed himself, and resumed his journey. After some time, Eshu played the same trick on Obatala twice more. First he poured black charcoal over Obatala and then red palm nut oil.<sup>176</sup>

In another creation story, Obatala, on his way to visit King Shango of Oyo, meets Eshu disguised as a charcoal dealer. Eshu asks Obatala to help him with the load, but when Obatala complies, Eshu puts his coal-black hands all over Obatala's clean white clothes.<sup>177</sup> In Chrétien's story of the Grail, Percival meets a charcoal dealer in the forest along the road to King Arthur's court.<sup>178</sup> Within the context of Arthurian literature, the role and symbolic meaning of the charcoal dealer has never been satisfactorily explained by scholars.<sup>179</sup>

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<sup>176, 177</sup> Beier U. (1980) *Yoruba Myths* –pp. 29, 30, 31

<sup>178</sup> Chrétien de Troyes (12<sup>th</sup> century) *Perceval, or The Story of the Grail*, v. 835, p. 850

<sup>179</sup> According to scholars of Medieval history, Chrétien used an allusion to Philip II, the Regent of France.

According to Orisha worship, Eshu (also known as Eshu-Elegba) is seen as an eternal wanderer, moving with quickness from one place to another, appearing where he is least expected. In one of his twenty-one personifications, he is known as *Eshu Alabwanna*, a being who lives in the woods.<sup>180</sup> In Chrétien's *Perceval*, charcoal dealer –as–Eshu is the character who acts as an opener of spiritual passages, guiding Percival through a symbolic death, and showing him the way to the Grail Castle, the Underground Duat, the City of Light that, in African legend, Eri built in Igboland. In Igbo tradition, Eshu is known as the leader of the aboriginal forest dwellers, cavemen, or dwarfs. His presence as a charcoal dealer in both Yoruba creation and Grail narratives identifies Percival as Obatala.

The aforementioned conclusion is further supported by different symbolic references related to Eshu found in the Welsh romance, *Peredur Son of Evrawg*, one of the tales from the Mabinogion. The link between Peredur and Percival is similar, but instead of a Grail, Peredur witnesses among the items carried in procession a bleeding lance and a platter on which is held a severed head. The platter as a reference to the Grail represents a direct link to the divining tray Opon Ifa, dominated by the head of Eshu. The severed head in Celtic myth is metaphorical, and unfortunately literal, transposition of Eshu's “spiritual head,” deriving from “the dying and the rising God in the New Year Festival of Ife.”<sup>181</sup> (During the procession, the Ifa priest carries the great tray Opon Ifa to the palace of the king, where the priest will sit opposite to the open door, while the face of Eshu on the tray faces the priest.)<sup>182</sup>

The bleeding lance of the Grail stories has its origin in the ritual staff Opa Osanyin (Opere/Osun), a symbol of Ifa in the form of an iron spear or forked staff. The staff is often used during processions as a walking stick, and stuck upright into the ground at Ifa shrines, where sacrifices are periodically offered to it. It is also considered a symbol of the God of Medicine Osanyin (Orunmila), the father of traditional medicine, and used among diviners in effecting physical healing.<sup>183</sup> The healing staff must regularly be nourished with animal blood to saturate it with life force *ashé*, which can be mobilized by means of invocations of the staff as a weapon against destructive forces. During healing rituals, the staff is regularly stuck point-down into the ground next to the ailing person.

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<sup>180</sup> Gonzáles-Wippler M. (1989) *Santería: The Religion, Faith, Rites, Magic*, pp. 19, 28, 30

<sup>181</sup> Dierk L. (2004) *Ancient Kingdoms of West Africa*, pp. 343–376

<sup>182</sup> Buller Fagg W., Pemberton J., Holcombe P. (1998) *Yoruba sculpture of West Africa*, p. 114

<sup>183</sup> Bascom W. W. (1969) *Ifa Divination: Communication between Gods and Men in West Africa*, p. 84



References to Eshu in the Celtic version of the Grail do not end here. Another is represented by the sacred cave with a phallic pillar at its entrance near the court of the “Sons of the King of Sufferings,” when Peredur witnesses the Cauldron of Rebirth performing resurrections. Also Eshu is known to possess the power to confer fertility and is often portrayed with the traits of a phallic god, whose figures and pillars are erected at the entrances of villages, crossroads, houses, shrines, and caves.<sup>184</sup>

In the Ifa divination system, Eshu's number is three, or any multiple of three, especially 21. As previously mentioned, 21 is the number of personifications of Eshu in the Ifa divination system. Twenty-one is also the number of days Peredur spent in the castle of the witches of Caer Loyw. The number is also encountered in the part of the story where Peredur rides 21 times over Sir Cei (or Kai). In the Celtic romance, Sir Cei is said to possess the ability to exist nine days and nine nights without the need to breathe or to sleep. Cei's supernatural ability represents a direct link to the “Nine Night” funeral observance originated in Yoruba culture, consisting of nine nights (and days) of family prayers that may include singing and drumming, a mass, as well as rituals of “feeding” or “refreshing” the soul of the departed.<sup>185</sup>

“Breath” is the word for “Spirit” in many African languages. Among the Yoruba people, Egungun, the ritual performance of ancestor worship, refers to the breathing of the dead and the deceased as those “who have not gone away, who are never dead.”<sup>186</sup> During the Egungun festival, organized by a secret society among the Yoruba people of Ede, the priest sings: “I cannot sleep, I cannot sleep though my eyes are heavy”.<sup>187</sup>

Nine is also the number of witches met by Peredur, as well as the number of witches slain by Cei in the mystical poem *Pa Gur*. Nine are the otherworldly maidens of the Arthurian poem *Preiddiau Annwen*, as well as the number of Oya, the Yoruba female warrior deity of fire, wind and thunder. Oya is also known as the “mother of nine children,” one of which is Egungun. She has a close relationship to death and ancestors and is present from the moment of death. Her purpose in funeral rituals is to invoke *iku* (“death”), who initiates the process of passing from one world into another. Oya opens the gates to the realm of ancestors, where the spiritual characters of Arthurian legend take form.

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<sup>184</sup> Beier U. (1963) *African Mud Sculpture*, p. 72

<sup>185</sup> Koskoff E. (2008) *The Concise Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, Vol. 1, p. 235

<sup>186</sup> Rooney C. (2000) *African Literature, Animism and Politics*, p. 21

<sup>187</sup> Barber K. (1991) *I could Speak Until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town*, p. 253

A reference to the number nine is also found in Medieval Grail literature mentioning the battle of the nine bridges, when Percival defeats 27 knights who guard the entrance of the Grail castle (27 is three times nine).<sup>188</sup> In Ifa divination, battling is associated with the ninth *odu*, *Ogunda Meji*, said to be owned by Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron and war. Ogun is given seven names, and thus he's associated with the number seven as well.<sup>189</sup> Not surprisingly, a reference to Ogun and the number seven is found in Chrétien's *Perceval* when Sir Gawain arranged “seven war horses” for his travel.<sup>190</sup> In the Welsh romance, the number nine is associated with the Celtic lance that “kills nine” at every blow, while Peredur, who was one of the seven sons of the Earl Evrawc, lost his father and other six brothers in combat (one plus six makes seven).<sup>191</sup> Death is associated with the number seven also in the 12<sup>th</sup> century *Didot Perceval*, supposed to be a prose version of Boron's lost *Perceval*. In the manuscript, Bron, identified as the Fisher King and Perceval's grandfather, after thinking the secret words concerning the Grail, dies seven days later; and the angels take his aged soul to heaven.<sup>192</sup> This passage corresponds to yet another particular funeral tradition found among the Yoruba dedicated to those who have died of old age (*isinku*). It involves seven days of ritual (*etutu*) performed to convey the spirit of the deceased to its otherworldly realm.<sup>193</sup>

The numbers 4, 8, 12, 14, 16, 20, and 24 are often found in Grail literature as well. These numbers are usually associated with knights, damsels, years, days or items. The doubling of the number four in the Celtic Grail legend corresponds to the mathematical and temporal structure of the Afa/Ifa divination practice. Four major knights of the Grail legend correspond to the four elemental spirits or “guardian forces” in Afa, or four principal Orishas in Ifa. These four Orishas are usually celebrated every four or five days, which makes 16 or 20 days of celebration, total. The mode of divination, or consulting Ifa, often involves the use of 16 or 24 palm nuts. Twenty-four, 20 or 16, are the numbers of knights most often encountered by Perceval or Peredur. In Ifa, the number 24, 16, and eight are considered the sacred numbers of Obatala. These numbers thus establish a direct link between Obatala, Perceval, and Peredur.

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<sup>188</sup> Author unknown (13<sup>th</sup> Century) *The High History of the Holy Grail*, XXII, p. 233

<sup>189</sup> Bonnefoy Y. (1991–1993) *American, African, and Old European Mythologies*, p. 145

<sup>190</sup> Chrétien de Troyes (12<sup>th</sup> century) *Perceval, or, The Story of the Grail*, p. 188.

<sup>191</sup> Matthews J. (1996) *Sources of the Grail: An Anthology, Chapter Three*, p. 47

<sup>192</sup> Unknown author (12<sup>th</sup> century) *Didot Perceval* 'E' Manuscript

<sup>193</sup> Drewall T. M. (1992) *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*, pp. 38, 39

It is interesting to note that the number 24 in Grail literature often appears as “four and twenty”. This expression corresponds to the vigesimal (base-20) counting system of which Afa and Ifa are well-known examples. Although the use of vigesimal counting is also known from Old French and Celtic languages, and is most often believed to constitute a spontaneous language innovation during the Medieval period, it should be taken into account that in Africa the earliest evidence of mathematical artifacts showing a complex array of values date back as far as 33,000 BCE.<sup>194</sup>

According to ethno-mathematician Ron Eglash, the Ishango Bone discovered in the Congo, dating back as far as 20,000 BCE, contains prime numbers between ten and 20, the word for an even number, a doubling system based on the number four, markings attributed to phases of the moon, and various engravings that may have comprised a calendar of events, such as ceremonies or rituals.<sup>195</sup> It demonstrates that ancient Africans were skilled mathematicians and that the tradition of ritual vigesimal counting and doubling of the number four among African ethnic groups is the oldest in the world.

Among the Igbo and Yoruba the vigesimal system is also applied in the case of larger numbers like 400, the square of twenty. Four hundred, *irinwo* in Yoruba corresponds to the number of Orishas or “guardian spirits” frequently found in Ifa verses or folktales that speak of Orunmila, Eshu, Egungun, or Obatala. Four hundred, *nnu* in Igbo, is a mystic number often used in traditional “praise poems”<sup>196</sup> sung during funeral ceremonies to express admiration of achievements. Four hundred, or 100, were the traditional numbers of men sent to fight other villages by military officers in inter-tribal wars.<sup>197</sup>

Four hundred, assisted by 20, is the number of the knights in Chrétien's *Perceval* who guard the Grail Castle.<sup>198</sup> Four hundred are the knights who could sit at tables or gather round a great fire in the Castle of Montsalvat in Wolfram's *Parzival*, written two decades after Chrétien's version. Four hundred and twenty are the hoes, birds, and scoundrels found in Ifa divination verses related to “Oke,” the dwarf man and road guardian of Igeti Hill.<sup>199</sup> Dwarves, who dispense advice from the top of burial mounds or give directions at road junctions, are similarly found in the romances of *Peredur*.

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<sup>194</sup> The Lebombo bone found in Swaziland East Africa is estimated to be 35,000 years old

<sup>195</sup> Bangura K. A. (2012) *African Mathematics: From Bones to Computers*, pp. 13, 14, 15

<sup>196</sup> A term assigned by Catherine Acholonu

<sup>197</sup> Ogbaa K. (1999) *Understanding Things Fall Apart*, p. 8

<sup>198</sup> Chrétien de Troyes (12<sup>th</sup> century) *Perceval: or the Story of the Grail*, pp. 67, 60

<sup>199</sup> Bascom W. R. (1980) *Sixteen Cowries: Yoruba Divination from Africa to the New World*, p. 111

Dwarves, both female and male, are encountered by Peredur upon his arrival at his uncle's court.<sup>200</sup> In Igboland, dwarves are known to have been adopted by the priest-king Eze-Nri of the Holy City of Nri, where they were converted into “sacred palace officials”.<sup>201</sup> Dwarfs born in parts of Igboland under Nri influence were regarded as mystical beings, skilled in medicine, and having other mysterious powers. Four hundred are the cowry shells prepared for ritual offering in the myth of *Obatala and the Witches*, when Obatala sought refuge in Orunmila's house after “stealing” water from the witches' well during a long drought.<sup>202</sup> Similarly, Peredur encounters the witches when they are laying waste to the lands around the castle at which he has been hosted.<sup>203</sup> Beliefs about witches are almost universal in Africa. Drought, disease, and death are attributed to witches or evil spirits active in the spiritual realm.

In the Welsh romances associated with the Mabinogion, we also encounter Peredur challenging, three times, the black man of the castle of Ysibidinongyl, who arose from beneath a cromlech (a megalithic chamber tomb).<sup>204</sup> The word “Ysibidinongyl” contains a clear etymological reference to the Igbo word *nsibidi* (sometimes spelled as “nsibiri”), mentioned in previous pages as the indigenous writing system mainly used in the cultures of the Cross River area, such as the Efik and Ekoi. Nsibiri ideograms are important elements of their religious practice and serve as mnemonic devices associated with death and burial traditions. Sacred Nsibidi pictographs are thought to protect and honour the deceased and thus are central to funeral rites and ancestor veneration. Peredur's arrival at the grove where he challenges the black man mounting a “bony”<sup>204</sup> horse corresponds to the Yoruba tale of Obatala entering the land of Oyo meeting Shango, the Yoruba god of thunder and lightning, feeding a “starving”<sup>205</sup> horse with grass. In the Welsh romance, Peredur cast the black man to earth several times, but the black man cannot die. This is because Shango, as in the case of other Orishas, is immortal. The souls of the dead don't have enough power to hold him in their kingdom. But even an immortal reaches a point of exhaustion: he suddenly disappears with Peredur's horse and his own. Only at the king's castle does Peredur behold his horse that the black man Shango has taken.

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<sup>200</sup> Gowans L. (1988) *Cei and the Arthurian Legend*, p. 90

<sup>201</sup> Onunwa U. R. (2010) *A Handbook of African religion and Culture*, pp. 11, 12

<sup>202</sup> Beier U. (1980) *Yoruba myths*, pp. 15, 16, 17

<sup>203</sup> Gowans M. L. (1988) *Cei and the Arthurian Legend, Perceval, Peredur, and Parzival*, p. 92

<sup>204</sup> The Maginogion (2011) from an 1849 edition, p. 83

<sup>205</sup> Lima R. (1995) *Dark Prism: Occultism in Hispanic Drama*, p. 175



Shango is encountered for the first time in the continuations of the Old French *Perceval* of Chrétien de Troyes, where he is referred to as the Black Knight.<sup>206</sup> As in the Welsh romance, Shango engages in a fierce battle with Perceval after emerging from his tomb. Still today, the kings of Oyo claim Shango as their ancestor, and his temple and tomb are reported to be located inside a great mound at Barra, a royal hierarchical village near Oyo.<sup>207</sup>

**Picture:** Shango portrayed as an equestrian figure supporting the Agere. The face on the agere might be associated with Shango's spiritual head. Courtesy: Africa Direct Inc. (Photo by Jared)

In the religious pantheon of the Yoruba, however, numbers and colours have no prescribed order and are often interchangeable between the various orishas. As previously mentioned, black (along with red) is also the colour of Eshu, who acts as a messenger between gods and men. Although Eshu is usually conceived of as male, his power is often given visual expression through both male and female figures. As a matter of fact, in sculptural representations he is often portrayed as a conjoined male and female figure.<sup>208</sup> Based on Eshu's gender interchangeability, and a peculiar alchemy of numbers, it is possible to link Eshu with the maiden who invites Peredur to challenge “three times” the black man, as well as witch who orders Perceval to call “three times” the Black Knight to come out of his tomb. Three is the number of Eshu in Ifa divination and “three” are the tricks played by Eshu on Obatala on his journey to the Oyo Kingdom, and “three,” are the wives of Shango: Oya, Osun, and Oba.<sup>209</sup>

Black, along with red and white, are the colours of beads in necklaces worn by Shango priests, and these colours constitute the basic set of colours encountered in Grail legends (for instance, the black, red, and white knights). The sacred number three, as well as the colour of blood, will allow us to uncover the origins of the identity of the Red Knight.

<sup>206</sup> Godwin M. (1944) *The Holy Grail: Its Origins, Secrets & Meaning Revealed*, pp. 95, 96, 97

<sup>207</sup> Temple D. O. (2013) *Notes of the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Northern Provinces of Nigeria*, p. 387 – Second Edition C.L. Temple – first published 1919

<sup>208</sup> Hörmann R. and Mackenthun G. (2010) *Human Bondage in the Cultural Contact Zone*, p. 179

<sup>209</sup> Philip N. (1997, 2007) *Myths and Legends Explained*, p. 86

Although the Yoruba regard Shango as a warrior, Ogun maintains a dominant position as war deity. Ogun's principal colour is red, the colour of blood, and rituals dedicated to Ogun often involve animal sacrifice during which the blood is usually dripped onto ground or onto iron tools that represent the deity. Among the Yoruba, the favourite sacrificial animal for Ogun is the dog. During festivals dedicated to the deity, the priest drops “three drops” of blood from the neck of a dog onto ground or the cover of the calabash, and then pours the rest of the blood into the ritual vessel in order to lend *ashé* (life force) to the festivities.<sup>210</sup> The priest then chants:

“Ogun, dripping, dripping! Blood touches the ground, descend blessing!”<sup>211</sup>

An explanation of the tradition of letting blood drip onto the ground or onto sacred objects is probably to be found in the belief that the soul is in the blood, and that consequently any ground, or ritual object, on which it falls becomes sacred. Furthermore, the sacred number three used in ritual sacrifice derives from the belief that every person has three spiritual “Guardian Spirits”: *Olori*, who dwells in the head and is seen as a protector and guide; *Ipin ijeun*, who dwells in the stomach and communicates to humans through hunger; and *Ipori*, situated in the big toe, who accompanies humans on their worldly and otherworldly journeys.<sup>212</sup>

The episodes in which Perceval confronts the Red Knight and considers “three drops of blood” left by a goose wounded by a falcon thus evidence a direct link with Ogun.<sup>213</sup> Furthermore, in Chrétien's novel, the court discovers Perceval contemplating the drops of blood on the snow and thinking of Blanchefleur. The fact that blood reminds Perceval of Blanchefleur is not coincidental. Blanchefleur (literally, “white flower”) corresponds to the Yoruba goddess Yemoja, the ocean goddess, and the mother of all other orishas. Yemoja is considered the guardian of *ashé*, the animating life force contained in blood.<sup>214</sup> She is associated with the Ogun river, and her name is derived from Yoruba title *Yeyomo Eja*, meaning “Mother of the Fish Children”. On New Year's Eve, tens of thousands of Yemoja's disciples dress in white and descend on beaches offering bouquets of white flowers, candles, and other presents to her. In *Peredur*, Yemoja corresponds to Owein, “The Lady of the Fountain”.

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<sup>210</sup> Yerimah A. P. (2002) *Yemoja: drama*, p. 24

<sup>211</sup> Ife: Annals of the Institute of Cultural Studies, University of Ife, Edition 1-2 (1986), p. 59,

<sup>212</sup> Ellis A. B. (2006) *Yoruba-Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa, Chapter VII. The Indwelling Spirits and Souls of Men*

<sup>213</sup> Chrétien de Troyes (12<sup>th</sup> century) *Perceval: ou le Conte du Graal*.

<sup>214</sup> Jennings Delois La V. (2008) *Toni Morrison and the Idea of Africa*, p. 169



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**Picture:** Ogun portrayed as equestrian warrior holding a bronze staff, Yoruba peoples. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Klaus G. Perls, 1991 (1991.17.132) Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art

In the Welsh romances associated with the Mabinogion, symbolic references to Ogun are found on more than one occasion. The most important is the Celtic lance described as dripping “three drops of blood” on the floor, or as cooling off in a cauldron of blood<sup>215</sup> that provides immortality and brings the corpses of knights back to life.<sup>216</sup>

In Welsh literature, the cauldron that is able to revive the dead corresponds to Ogun's cauldron, which usually contains the ceremonial knife or spear-shaped blade used to commit animal sacrifice. The iron tool emmersed in blood becomes symbolic of transforming the life force of blood into spiritual fire inside the cauldron, emphasizing the close relationship between the art of blacksmithing, shamanism, and healing. When a priest of Ogun slaughters an animal, he precedes the sacrifice by saying: “May the Spirit of this animal reincarnate to feed my family in the future”. The blood of the animal is then returned to the earth in order to release its regenerative (fertilizing) properties. Although Ogun is mainly associated with warfare or hunting, he is said to possess powers of physical healing and spiritual renewal as well.<sup>217</sup>

Ogun's cauldron itself resembles the famous *mkisi* pot set on three stones above fire to prepare primordial medicines by *Ne Kongo*, the progenitor of the Kongo kingdom. Sometimes considered a portable burial container, elements like earth, or relics from the grave of a powerful individual, were placed inside. At the bottom of the iron pot, the diviner (*ngaga*) would trace the Bakongo cosmogram representing the four stages of the soul: birth, life, death, and rebirth. In this way, the pot contained the spirit and powers of the dead (*nfumbi*), which then were “revived” and controlled by the diviner.<sup>218</sup>

<sup>215</sup> Bruce J. D. (2006) *The Evolution of Arthurian Romance*, vol. 2, pp. 271–273

<sup>216</sup> Loth J. (1913) *Mabinogion, Peredur*, vol. 2, p. 94

<sup>217</sup> Boahen A. A. (2004) *Africa in the Twentieth Century: The Ade Boahen Reader*, p.17

<sup>218</sup> Singleton T. A. (1999) *I, Too, Am America: Archaeological Studies of African–American Life*, p. 120

In Benin shrines, Ogun was depicted in a war costume of red colour, wearing or holding his most representative tools or weapons (i.e., a chain, spear, sword etc.). In order to describe his violent temper or ferocity, his eyes were often painted red.<sup>219</sup> A reference to Ogun's red eyes was given in Wolfram Eschenbach's early thirteenth-century *Parzival*, where the fearsome Red Knight was introduced as having “gear so red that it infected the eye with its redness”.<sup>220</sup> Also his lance-head, shaft, and sword, were all described as red. Eschenbach's descriptions of the Red Knight recall images of Ogun shrines in which the iron tools or weapons of the deity are smeared with the blood of animal sacrifices and other substances in order to exalt the deity's charisma.

Additional evidence indicating a close relationship between Ogun and the Red Knight of Celtic literature is found in the episode of the Red Knight's arrival at the court of Arthur. In *Perceval*, the Red Knight insults the king and queen and seizes the king's drinking cup. In *Peredur*, the Red Knight snatches the goblet from Gwenhwyfar's hands and spills its contents over her face and breasts.<sup>221</sup>

**Picture:** Agere-Ifa of Maternal Goddess; Yoruba peoples. Courtesy: Hamill Gallery Boston MA © 2013

A number of different explanations for the origin of the Red Knight's outrageous behaviour have been proposed by Western Grail scholars. Some see it as an act of rape against the queen, others as the equivalent to the seizure of the kingdom. However, once again, truly satisfactory and resonant answers are found only in African mythological narratives and sacred art. As mentioned, among the Yoruba, female power is thought to be contained in the Agere. Women's breasts are thus considered to be vessels of fertility and nutrition in both the spiritual and physical sense.



In sculptural art, the patron goddess Yemoja (sometimes spelled as Yemaya, Yemanja, Yemoya, etc.), and other female goddesses like Osun and Oya, are portrayed on ritual vessels as a kneeling large-breasted mother with a child strapped to her back, or as a woman surrounded by several children. In folklore, Yemoja is sometimes referred to as Olokun and may be portrayed as half woman and half fish. In Southeastern Nigeria, Yemoja is known as Mami Wata (Igbo *Nne Mmiri*), a primordial water deity who invoked by priestesses to cure their patients.

<sup>219</sup> Barnes S.T. (1997) *Africa's Ogun, Second Expanded Edition: Old World and New*, p. 57

<sup>220</sup> Gowans L. (1988) *Cei and the Arthurian Legend*, p. 93

<sup>221</sup> Proceedings of the PMR Conference, vol. 8-11, p. 113 – Augustinian Historical Institute, Villanova University (1983); [www.mabinogion.info](http://www.mabinogion.info)

In African legends, aggressive forms of communication like mockery or insult represent a recurrent narrative motif that continues to influence traditional customs and the sociocultural life of people even today. In these stories, animals, deities, important historical figures, or common mortals are all suspect to being ridiculed, slandered, tricked, mocked, or insulted. In most of these stories, we encounter little rats insulting an antelope, monkeys provoking a dispute between a lion and an elephant, snails insulting a deity, orishas quarreling each other or playing tricks on humans.

In one version of a popular creation story, Yemoja and Ogun, in contracting their marriage, reveal their respective taboos to one another. Ogun discovers he should not insult Yemoja's breasts, and Yemoja discovers she should not touch Ogun's medicine. However, after touching Ogun's medicine in order to protect it from the rain, Yemoja has her breasts insulted by Ogun in response. So, Yemoja takes Ogun's pot of medicinal herbs and runs away. While Ogun is chasing her, Yemoja falls down and spills the medicinal water on the ground. The spot and place where Yemoja fell is now known as the River Ogun, the river of medicine.<sup>222</sup>

Even the use of ritual mockery and insults has a long tradition in Yoruba society. For example, during annual festivals of cosmic ordering dedicated to Ogun, men's and women's groups vigorously attack each other verbally, and insulting references to sexual organs are but one part of the insulting repertoire.<sup>223</sup> On other occasions, like the King's Festival, closely tied to the ritual protest, *Opepee*, the masses spend all night roaming the town and hurling insulting songs at king and chiefs.<sup>224</sup>

These festivals offer a symbolic opportunity for the free expression of people's opinion on sociopolitical issues and are intended to preserve and strengthen the established order. This becomes particularly evident during purification festivals designed to purify the community and revitalize the king, and in ritual gatherings in front of the house of a social offender (e.g., a chief or figure of the elite judged by the community to have contravened its norms), when people sing satirical songs about him or her.<sup>225</sup>

The aggression and insult offered by the Red Knight to the king and queen in Western Grail literature can be thus summarized in a few words as having their origins in ancient African traditions.

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<sup>222</sup> Phillips L. (2006) *The Womanist Reader*, pp. 233, 234

<sup>223</sup> African Arts, vol. 15–16, African Studies Center, University of California, Los Angeles (1981), p. 63

<sup>224</sup> Clark G. (1988) *Traders versus the state*, p. 86

<sup>225</sup> Layiwola D. (2000) *African Theatre in Performance: A Festschrift in Honour of Martin Banham*, p. 57

# Obatala: The Metamorphosis of a God



**Picture:** Agere-Ifa of Obatala portrayed as equestrian warrior. Yoruba peoples. Nigeria Credit: Museum für Völkerkunde Leipzig (Maf22514)

**Percival:** [holding the Grail to Arthur's lips] “You and the land are one. Drink.”

**Arthur:** “I am wasting away. I cannot die and I cannot live.”

**Percival:** “Drink from the chalice. You will be reborn and the land with you.”

**Arthur:** [drinks] “Percival... I didn't know how empty was my soul... until it was filled.”

– Quote from the film *Excalibur* inspired by Chrétien's novel *Perceval: or the Story of the Grail*

From the time an Agere-Ifa begins to deteriorate, it is buried in the sacred grove believed to be the abode of deities. When unpreserved, the wooden ritual container has a relatively short lifespan of about hundred years; that is to say, everything is subject to the cyclical nature of life, and death. In Nigeria, sacred groves are spaces exclusively reserved for rituals or shrines, and in most cases only the initiates or their students are allowed to enter them. During initiation rites, incantations are sung by initiates at the entrance gate (*enu ona*) in order to obtain permission for entrance, as if they're going to enter the ancient city of Ile-Ife, which, according to oral tradition, was the origin of all humankind.<sup>226</sup>

The mythological record suggests that the city of Ile-Ife, today known simply as Ife, was established when the supreme orisha Obatala stepped onto earth and established at that site the first sacred grove.<sup>227</sup> Upon the founding of several kingdoms, Yoruba kings therefore saw Ife as their spiritual motherland, and were buried in a sacred grove there upon their death. Because of this connection, Obatala was named and styled “Protector of the Town Gates,” and often portrayed as an equestrian warrior brandishing a spear.

<sup>226</sup> Drewall T. M. (1992) *Yoruba Ritual: Performers, Play, Agency*, p. 65

<sup>227</sup> Clark M. A. (2012) *Then We'll Sing a New Song: African Influences on America's Religious Landscape*, pp. 89, 90

According to the teachings of the Babalawo (lit. “Father of the Secrets”), who serves as the oracular representative between the gods and humans, the word “Orisha” always designates Obatala, as well as the gods of his lineage. Obatala is also known as “Orishanla” (the great Orisha). The Yoruba people often call him “Oba Igbo” (King Igbo), because he was the King of the original Igbo nation from which the Yoruba and Benin and other Kwa peoples split off when Oduduwa (called by Igbo “Idu Eri” and in Benin “Idu”) stripped of his kingdom. Yoruba, Igbo, and Benin have the same origin through the sky being who landed in Igboland. When Eri/Idu came, he settled by the Lower Niger River among the cavemen dwarfs called Igbo (lit. “Forest Dwellers”). In Igbo, Oduduwa means “King of the World” or “Leader of the World,” for this was when the world spoke one language, namely Igbo. Today most historians are trying to separate the Benin origins from Yoruba and Igbo origins because of clannish politics, but that is false etymology and false history, as the works of Catherine Acholonu clearly indicate.<sup>228</sup>

Obatala is the son of Eri, but he is also Eri's invisible identity or alter ego. Obatala is an androgyne, representing the productive energy of nature as distinguished from the creative power of Chukwu. He is “Elohim,” the Creator, who molded man and woman out of clay and water, into which Chukwu breathed life force and spirit. Obatala incarnates both male and female aspects of a single androgynous divinity and consequently, as with most other orishas, he has the power to divide himself into multiple personalities: an old man, a young warrior, his wife.<sup>229</sup> Obatala as Orunmila (Eri) is the author of Afa. He is the Lord of Righteousness who fought with Oduduwa over the right to rule the City of Light which their father, Eri, established. Oduduwa won the battle by false claims and banished Obatala and usurped his title of World Ruler (*Odudu Uwa*, in Igbo language). That City of Light (Old Ife, in Yoruba, and Oraeri, in Igbo) was the real Jerusalem and the original Babylon, as revealed in Catherine Acholonu's 2013 book, *Eden in Sumer on the Niger*.<sup>230</sup>

Obatala's colour is white, the colour of purity, peace, truth and justice. His numbers are eight, 16, and 24. Offerings to him include coconut, doves, cotton, white eggshells, etc. His feast is celebrated on September 24, the day of Our Lady of Mercy in the Roman Catholic Church. Obatala is the “King of White Cloth” and, like Jesus, who also wore white, he stands for the True Son of God – the Christ.

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<sup>228</sup> Information obtained from Catherine Acholonu during a discussion about the figure of Oduduwa

<sup>229</sup> Littlewood R. (1993) *Pathology and Identity: The Work of Mother Earth in Trinidad*, pp. 145, 146

<sup>230</sup> Acholonu C. and Davis S. (2013) *Eden in Sumer on the Niger: Archaeological, Linguistic and Recorded Evidence of 450,000 Years of Atlantis, Eden and Sumer in West Africa*.

Temples, ritual objects, and images dedicated to Obatala are always painted white. White are the cloths worn by Yoruba priests, and white are their armlets of palm fibre and necklaces of beads. Followers who worship Obatala invariably wear white robes, because he is the creator of the spiritual garment that binds all things in nature. In one of his different manifestations, Obatala is known as Obalufon, a female deity of white cloth from Ife who presides over the art of weaving and clothing humankind, and who is therefore worshiped as the orisha of weavers.<sup>231</sup> The weaving process itself, which is said to have its origin in the spirit world, is likened to the first manifestation of the Word from the creator. Weaving is thus writing, and the words woven into cloths, or into the hair, are the sacred words uttered by the supreme Orisha.

During festivals dedicated to Obatala, people are usually clothed in white, and white chalk is used to draw sacred symbols on the body of people or on the ground. Like the art of blacksmithing, the weaving of clothes in Nigeria has been in existence for thousands of years. In Nigeria, the culture of weaving with woven palm, or raffia fronds, dates much earlier than the later tradition of woven cotton cloth. Even today, exquisite designs of woven palm are still produced. Among weaving communities of the Southern Igbo, many materials for weaving textiles used for ritual purposes and on ceremonial occasions are grown and processed locally. For raffia weaves, the yarn comes from the raffia palm; for others, yarn made from cotton and sisal hemp is used.<sup>232</sup>

In Igboland, the tender fronds of the palm tree have very peculiar and symbolic meanings. “Omu,” as it is called, portrays a sacred and divine purity.<sup>233</sup> On some occasions, woven ropes made of palm fronds when knotted at the edge, declare certain locations out of bounds to all but the authorised. In the past, the importance of palm fronds was particularly emphasized during inter-tribal conflicts, when, to symbolize peace, young palm fronds (*omu nkwu*) were carried with white clay (*nzu ocha*) by village elders.

Igbo also use palm fronds for the production of traditional baskets known as “ekete” or “nkata”. These baskets are used for giving or receiving gifts or as sacred containers during divination rituals. The woven basket is also one of the key symbols in Igbo creation myth, as well as in the story of Jesus. And, as will be shown, the similarity between the words “nkata” and “krater” is not accidental.

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<sup>231</sup> McKenzie P. R. (1997) *Hail Orishat: A Phenomenology of a West African Religion in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, p. 494

<sup>232</sup> Afigbo A. E. (2005) *Nigerian History, Politics and Affairs: The Collected Essays of Adiele Afigbo*, p. 95, 96

<sup>233</sup> Onuigbo N. S. (2009) *Igbo: Three worlds in Igbo traditional Religion*, p. 101



Philological evidence confirming a close relationship between the words “nkata” and “krater,” as well as between the woven basket and the Sacred Grail, is found in *Spitzer's Grail Etymology*. To the various interpretations of the word “grail,” he adds a new one:

“A *cratalis*-e can, accordingly, be derived from Lat. *cratis*-es “something woven, plaited, interlaced” — compare the derivation of *cratis*, *craticius*, *craticula*, in Romance (R.E.W., 2302–4): one will note the use of “osier,” of the white rod, the flexible material, *par excellence*, for such baskets. The most primitive receptacle must have been the basket made of flexible branches of “white rod”; later the word was transferred to bowls of wood (the Morvan stage), tin (the *grelet* of Fribourg), still later of silver and other precious metals — and it is in this latter reference that it appears in Chretien, Robert de Boron, and in Helinandus.” <sup>234</sup>



**Picture:** Agere-Ifa in the form of a woven basket enclosing the earth god El (Eri/Obatala). Credit: Brooklyn Museum

Additional etymological evidence linking the word “nkata” to the Holy Grail is found in a passage from the chronicles of the Cistercian monk, Helinandus. He informs us that one of the names of the sacred vessel is “dish” (*scutella*), in popular speech also called “greal,” because it is pleasant (*grata*) and acceptable (*acceptabilis*) to Medieval banqueters. It suggests that the meaning of the sacred vessel is closely connected to the word “grata” (pleasant/acceptable), as well as to the Old French word “agr  er” (to please), both used for giving and receiving viands or gifts.<sup>235</sup> These words, however, are applicable not only to table manners, but also to the religious practice of people bringing food offerings in order to “please” the Gods, or to prepare sacrifices which are “pleasant” and “acceptable” to them. The evident etymological relationships between the words “grata” and “nkata” and “agr  er” and “agere,” further consolidate the transition Spitzer posits from “woven basket” to “wooden bowl” and a sacred vessel made of “precious metal.”

In addition, in Nigeria the palm tree is worshipped as the “Tree of Life,” and the palm frond basket *nkata*, like the wooden Agere, is feminine and associated with harvest and the storage of cocoyam. Yam, cocoyam, and oil palm are the creations of Eri/Obatala and are closely identified with Ala.

<sup>234</sup> A. Nitze W. (1945) *Spitzer's Grail Etymology – The American Journal of Philology*– Vol. 66, No. 3, pp. 279–281 – published by Johns Hopkins University Press

<sup>235</sup> Helinandus of Frigidimontis (1204) *Description of the Holy Grail*



**Picture:** bronze pot from Igbo-Ukwu on a pedestal and enclosed in a basket of knotted rope-work (*nkata*). Courtesy: Quittenbaum Kunstauktionen GmbH © 2013

Perhaps one of the most important discoveries made at the site of Igbo-Ukwu was a bronze pot set on a pedestal and enclosed in a basket of woven rope-work (*nkata*). This magnificent bronze pot is typical of sacred vessels used for ceremonial or ritual purposes and was explicitly designed to hold sacred water or medicinal ingredients. Water is considered sacred to the Igbo, and certain lakes, rivers, and springs often serve religious functions. It is said that water from these sources has cleansing properties for ailments the power to cure any ailment. Water is also associated with the spirit world. Water is believed to be the abode of water spirits and the place where the souls of the dead find temporary abode while awaiting reincarnation.<sup>236</sup>

Such a ritual pot is called “Udu” in both Igbo and Sumerian traditions. Udu-Eze is the ritual pot for confirmation of an Eze Nri (priest-king) chosen by Eri (Obatala) to rule. It is obtained from the Omambala sacred lake in which dwells the goddess possessing supernatural powers in the Igbo creation myth. The Grail Pot that is said to have belonged to Oma (or Amma, as the goddess is called in Igbo), was also the natural property of her Son Ele, the Earth God, or Amun.<sup>237</sup>

In Arthurian legend, the figure of Amma corresponds to the Lady of the Lake, Viviana (Lat. *Vivianus*, from *vivus* “alive”), best known for her presentation to King Arthur of the magical sword Excalibur, through the intervention of the King's druidic advisor Merlin. The name Viviana is the same as, or similar, to the name of the Celtic water goddess “Vi-vianna,” or “Co-vianna,” a variant of the water goddess Coventina. Coventina was the foster-mother of Lancelot, and it is told that she raised him beneath the murky waters of her lake. The Lady of the Lake and Sir Lancelot are first mentioned by Chrétien de Troyes in the 12<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>238</sup>

<sup>236</sup> Galle J. E. and Young A. L. (2004) *Engendering African American Archaeology: A Southern Perspective*, p. 164

<sup>237</sup> Acholonu C. and Davis S. (2013) *Eden in Sumer on the Niger: Archaeological, Linguistic and Recorded Evidence of 450,000 Years of Atlantis, Eden and Sumer in West Africa*

<sup>238</sup> Chrétien de Troyes (1170) *Erec and Enide* (line 1674)

In the Sumerian creation myth, Amma/Vivianna corresponds to Tiamat, the primordial goddess of the ocean. Tiamat is the source of all creation and mother of the gods. She is the ocean that contains the seeds of life, a thousand souls, a thousand thoughts, a thousand voices. Creation takes place when her fertile womb gets impregnated by the Great Spirit of Light. Sumerian records say that, during one of the stages of creation, conflict broke out among the gods, the goddess was slain, and the Udu “pot” or “medicine pot” Grail forcibly seized from her by Thor (Sumerian Dur/Tur).<sup>239</sup>

As mentioned earlier, the odd theme of insult against the female principle is a frequent motif in Grail romances. An episode of particular cruelty is encountered in Sir Thomas Malory's 15<sup>th</sup> century romance, *Le Morte d'Arthur* (“The Death of Arthur”), when Sir Balin beheaded the Lady of the Lake in the court of the king. In Malory's romance, which is essentially a rehandling of the earlier Vulgate Cycle written in Old French during the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, we also encounter Balin fighting his younger brother Balan until both are wounded to death. The two brothers and valiant knights of King Arthur's Court are said to have come out of the same womb, and they were buried in one tomb.<sup>240</sup> Balan and Balin, whose names share a possible etymological root with Obatala, are two different manifestations of the supreme Orisha. In local myths of the Yoruba, Obatala has several subordinates. One of them is Orisha Oko, a deity of agriculture and “king,” who once was married to Yemoja, the ocean goddess. Their two sons most emphasized in legends were Ogun and his younger brother Shango, who regularly fought with each other for different reasons.<sup>241</sup> As in any other creation account characterized by a fight between brothers, the fight between Ogun and Shango represents the counter-balancing of cosmic forces.

The fight between Balan and Balin from Arthurian legend, interestingly, also parallels the fight between Baal and El, the two gods of Canaanite creation myth. In the texts of ancient Ugarit from northern Syria, Baal fights against the sea-monster goddess Baalat (known as Ishtar to the Babylonians) and Death. Baalat is acting on the instructions of the father of the gods, El (Atum/Lancelot), the true water god of Canaanite religion, whom the younger gods have dethroned. Baalat demands that El surrender Baal up to her. El agrees, but Baal kills Baalat. Since Baalat appears to be an emanation of El, Baal (Obatala) is in effect fighting against himself.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>239</sup> see Catherine Acholonu (2013) *Eden in Sumer on the Niger*

<sup>240</sup> Sir Thomas Malory *Le Morte d'Arthur*, first published in 1485

<sup>241</sup> Apter A. (1929) *Black Critics and Kings: The Hermeneutics of Power in Yoruba Society*, p. 61

<sup>242</sup> Baldick J. (1998) *Black God: The Afroasiatic Roots of the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Religions*, p. 38/39

Another name given to the Lady of the Lake in the Post-Vulgate Cycles is “Ninianne”. Her story is almost identical to the one in the Lancelot-Grail, though it adds her bestowal of Excalibur to Arthur. “Ninianne” is an etymological descendant of “Inanna,” the Sumerian goddess of love and fertility. In Akkadian accounts, Inanna is known as Ishtar, the mother goddess associated with planet Venus. Her symbol is the eight-pointed star (formed by two four-pointed stars), said to be symbolic of the eight-year orbital cycle of planet Venus with respect to the Earth and the Sun. Inanna's earthly abode was at the ziggurat temple of Anna/Eanna in Uruk. She was the goddess who granted her chosen kings the title “King of Kish,” and they, in turn, became her beloved husbands.<sup>243</sup>

One of Inanna's husbands was Eannatum (Eana-Inanna-Ibgalkaka-Atum), whose seed was implanted by the sun god Ningirsu in the womb of Ninhursaga, the great mother goddess. Ninhursaga was the goddess who birthed and nourished with her milk Eannatum and all other Sumerian kings. In one of her different manifestations, Ninhursaga becomes Ninurta, the Sumerian warrior god and god of rain and fertility. Ninhursaga and Inanna, in the same way as Obatala, are sometimes male warrior, sometimes female suckling a child. But in fact they are androgyne, representing the productive power of nature, the father and mother of all material manifestations.<sup>244</sup>

Another one of Inanna's husbands was Sargon the Great, king of Akkad, whom explorer Laurence Waddell considered the father of Menes, founder of the Egyptian dynasties. In Babylonian accounts related to Sargon's birth, it is said that he was conceived by a mother who was a vestal virgin, and who set him in a basket afloat on the river when he was an infant. Sargon floated downstream until he was found by his adoptive father, a “drawer of water” and “gardener,” who appointed him as his assistant.<sup>245</sup> The presence of a woven basket in Sargon's legend is of crucial importance, because it relates the basket with *cratis-es*, the “krater” of rebirth, and identifies Sargon as the son of the Earth Dweller El/Ele, whose alter ego is Obatala (Igbo Eri). There are many parallels between Sargon and other legendary heroes like Gilgamesh, Moses, Osiris, Jesus, etc. The four key elements found in the myth of Sargon, and in mythological accounts and religious traditions of Igbo or Yoruba people, are virginity, to be understood as an aspect of androgyny; infant exposure, symbolizing the process of birth; the practice of gardening (or agriculture), symbolizing fertility and abundance; and sacred kingship, which embodies the idea that the king is the earthly manifestation of God.

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<sup>243</sup> De Shong B. (2000) *Inanna Lady of the Largest Heart*, p. 44

<sup>244</sup> Bowen T. J. (1857) *Central Africa: Adventures and Missionary Labors...*, p. 315

<sup>245</sup> Tigay J. H. (2002) *The Evolution of the Gilgamesh Epic*, p. 254

First and foremost, the mythological account of Eri, the androgyne god and primal king who sailed down the river Omambala (Anambra) and established himself at Aguleri, where he split into the first-born son and daughter. When food became scarce, Eri had to sacrifice his children and bury them in separate graves, from which sprouted yam, cocoyam, and other crops necessary to feed his kin. For this reason, Eri is credited with introducing gardening and agriculture. Likewise, Obatala, in the guise of Orisha Oko, the god of gardening and agriculture who ruled over the fertility of the land and human procreation, was made King of Irawo after freeing his people from famine.<sup>246</sup> In Yoruba Irawo means “Star,” and the key emblem of the “God of the Field,” as Orisha Oko is called north of Irawo, is a long iron staff said to possess the power of healing, fecundity, and wealth.<sup>247</sup>

Additional references related to Sargon's birth legend, as well his tutelary deity Inanna, are found in the annual Osun–Osogbo Festival that honors the river goddess Osun, the tutelary deity of the city of Osogbo and protector of the Oba (king). As has been mentioned in a previous chapter, Osun is the Yoruba word for “water of life,” and her life-giving waters are considered a divine element endowed with supernatural powers of creation and dissolution. The most significant moment of Osun's festival is probably the ritual procession and pilgrimage of the king, when the Arugba, a young virgin priestess acting in the role of a medium, carries Osun's gifts down to the river bank.<sup>248</sup>

As for other water spirits, offerings to Osun may be placed in springs, on the river bank, or set afloat on the river. When women want to have children, they carry offerings to Osun's river in return for the gift of fertility. For this reason, Osun has been related with the word *orisun*, meaning “the source of a river, a people, or of children”.<sup>249</sup> During the festival, songs of praise are sung by the people who refer to the goddess as “death in the river,” the “drawer at dawn of the king's pure water,” or “the one who strikes the head of the beast against the tree”.<sup>250</sup> Osun is the keeper of the ancestral veiled crown of the Oba, and the only divinity who is able to withstand *Ina*, meaning “fire” in Yoruba. *Ina* is the spiritual fire that contains the principle of healing and is responsible for carrying souls to the heavens, as described by the Babalawo in the text of *Odù Irosùn Atééré*.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>246</sup> Beier U. (1980) *Yoruba Myths* –p. 48

<sup>247</sup> Roberts A. F. & Dewey J. W. (1994) *Staffs of Life: Rods, Staffs, and Wands from the Coudron Collection of African Art*, p. 49

<sup>248</sup> Benard E. and Moon B. (2000) *Goddesses Who Rule*, p. 130

<sup>249</sup> Olupona J. K. and Rey T. (2008) *Orisa Devotion as World Religion*, p. 116

<sup>250</sup> Thompson R. F. (1976) *Black gods and kings: Yoruba art at UCLA*, p. 1414

<sup>251</sup> Murphy J. M. and Sanford M. M. (2001) *Osun across the Waters*, p. 199

The evidence presented in the previous paragraph clearly demonstrates a close relationship between Sargon's birth legend and the Osun festival, as well as between the river goddess Osun and Sargon's tutelary goddess Inanna. This is true for the motifs present in Sargon's birth legend, which are reflected in the procession and pilgrimage dedicated to the Oba, as well as for the characteristics of the river goddess Osun that correspond to those of Inanna. From the mytho-religious perspective, the water out of which Sargon is drawn as a newborn corresponds to the life-giving water of the river Osun, associated with fertility, pregnancy, and maternity. The ideology of sacred kingship which derives its source from the river deity, and metamorphosis culminating at the stage of human existence as an expression of divinity in the world, is particularly emphasized in the way in which people respond to the appearance of Arugba carrying the offerings to the river, when the maiden is praised as the real king: "You are the King, You are the Elder, You are the King, the real King."<sup>252</sup>

The Arugba, exactly in the same way as Sargon's virgin mother, is thus seen as the reincarnation of the great river goddess and honored as the surrogate "mother" of the king. From Sumerian accounts we also learn that Inanna, exactly in the same way as Osun, is associated with the beast, a lion, and a tree, the sacred *huluppu* tree (the Sumerian version of the Tree of Life).<sup>253</sup> Moreover, in the poems of Enheduanna, high priestess of Sumer and daughter of Sargon, a group of warrior priestesses is described as coming forth from "beyond the river," after which Inanna's hands sear them with "purifying fire," with "Ina," the root word of Yoruba origin for Inanna's name. Etymological reference to Inanna's name is also found in the Yoruba word "Aina," a name given to both male and female children born with the umbilical cord twisted around the neck.<sup>254</sup> The tutelary deity of Aina children is Olokun, the god or goddess of the sea. The orisha is one of the white deities associated with Obatala (the great Orisha).<sup>255</sup>

The names "Aina" and "Ina" are etymologically related, not only to Inanna's name, but also to the Canaanite letter Ain (as in Ain Soph — "God"), depicted on the Igbo-Ukwu Grail pot in the form of intertwined cords or serpents. In Cabalistic writings, Ain Soph is explained as the vessel that contains the Ain (the limitless unmanifest condition before creation). Ain is said to be a masculine aspect of God, and Ain Soph, the feminine aspect of God, is said to take in the Light.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Murphy J. M. and Sanford M. M. (2001) *Osun across the Waters*, p. 61

<sup>253</sup> Benard E. and Moon B. (2000) *Goddesses Who Rule* –p. 74

<sup>254, 255</sup> McKenzie P. R. (1997) *Hail Orisha!: A Phenomenology of a West African Religion in the Mid-Nineteenth Century*, p. 91

<sup>256</sup> Hanson G. (2003) *Dynamic Kabbalah*, p. 142, 143

On the ritual Grail Pot we also find an eightfold geometrical pattern consisting of four-plus-four overlapping swastikas in the shape of the Milky Way galaxy. In Igbo creation mythology, four symbolizes creation brought to completion, while eight symbolizes beauty and perfection. It is said that the supreme orisha Obatala took eight days to create man by moulding the clay in his own image.<sup>257</sup> The eightfold pattern of the Grail Pot furthermore corresponds to the eightfold chalk symbol *Igha-Ede* used in Olokun worship to establish a connection between the material world and the spiritual realm, which, if multiplied, corresponds to the 16 primal energies of creation in Yoruba cosmology. The eightfold pattern corresponds to the eight-rayed Ishtar star associated with Inanna, a pattern formed by two four-rayed overlapping stars, and it corresponds to the eightfold Egyptian Ogdoad family tree of creation, as well as to the eight-rayed star symbol of the Khemennu (the Igbo Sky/Storm god *Khamanu*), the scribes of the Egyptian Duat, the “apemen” who lived under the earth before *Homo sapiens* was created. The eight-rayed star is a very common symbol in rural Nigeria and in Nsibidi. The numbers eight, 16, 24, and 32, are all associated with Obatala the creator god.

British explorer L.A. Waddell, author of *The Makers of Civilization in Race & History*, noted in his Sumerian Grail/Bowl genealogy that, in the Indian king-lists, the fourth king, Udu, is called “Uda of the Vase (Uda-Vasu).”<sup>258</sup> The vase in question, it was been discovered, is the ritual Grail Pot/Vase excavated by Thurstan Shaw several meters beneath the present town of Igbo-Ukwu. The king buried there wore a regalia strung with 111,000 carnelian with coloured glass beads. This was a world emperor, whose horse rider was found in his grave. In fact all five royal emblems of the Kings Menes of Egypt were found in the tomb and around it, including those of Sargon, found in nearby pits. Translations (made by professor Catherine Acholonu and her colleagues) of inscriptions found at the site where the Grail Pot was excavated indicate that this was a Sumerian/Igbo civilization. In her new book, *Eden in Sumer on the Niger*, evidence is presented that shows that this was the lost city of Sargon the Great that had never been found: for Sumerians were ancient Nigerians who migrated to the Middle East after their nation was destroyed.<sup>259</sup> From Sumerian and Akkadian literature, we know that Sumerians referred to themselves as “black-headed people” as if to emphasize their difference from other population(s), while ancient Egypt was described as “the country of black-footed ones”.

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<sup>257</sup> M M. (2012) *The Meaning of the Beginning: A Perspective from an Igbo-African Popular Religious Philosophy*, p. 6

<sup>258</sup> Waddell L. A. (1929) *The Makers of Civilization in Race and History*, p. 92

<sup>259</sup> Acholonu C. and Davis S. (2013) *Eden in Sumer on the Niger: Archaeological, Linguistic and Recorded Evidence of 450,000 Years of Atlantis, Eden and Sumer in West Africa*



In one of his 16 manifestations, Obatala is a fierce young warrior on horseback named Ayaguna, holding a staff in one hand and swinging a sword in the other.<sup>260</sup> Ayaguna's colours are white and red, and his number is eight and its multiples (16, 24, 32 etc.). Accordingly, collars dedicated to Ayaguna are made of white and red strands or beads comprised of a main circle of 16 strands. Ayaguna was a world traveller and emissary of the Supreme Being Olodumare in a time that corresponds to the Fall of Man described in Christian theology: the transition of the first man and woman from a state of innocent obedience to God to a state of “guilty disobedience”. If Biblical and mythological accounts are fully examined, the abandonment of immortality does not relate to a particular physical condition, but rather to the progressive loss of a higher state of consciousness experienced as an intimate union with the Divine. Such union was expressed on the physical and spiritual plane of godlike beings possessing mental faculties capable of creating and shaping the material world at will. Dogmatic scientists reject a possible existence of a spiritual level *a priori*. This is particularly evident in the case of androgynous people, or true hermaphrodites, explained by modern scientists as an “abnormality” in the male and female chromosomes that leads to the production of “freaks of nature”.<sup>261</sup>

Ancient African lore tells us that the spiritual component of androgyny sleeping within us that can reawaken a state of consciousness that will allow us to reclaim the Garden of Eden and find again eternal life in the union with All that Is. In Western Grail tradition, the quest for the long-lost union with God is symbolically achieved by finding and drinking from the sacred vessel that once contained the blood of Christ: the Christic energy or consciousness. In Yoruba sacred lore, this spiritual journey is known as “The Search Into The Ocean Beyond”. In this search, the initiate awakes at the dawn of a legendary day, which dissolves darkness into sunlight and brings night into daylight.<sup>262</sup> Igbo aborigines describe this uninterrupted communion between the human and the divine world as an “Age of Eternal Day,” when there was neither night nor day but the eternal presence of God. In Igbo, the word used to refer to the First People, who were wielders of supernatural powers, is *esh*, *eshi*, or *nshi*. All Sumerian kings bore the title *Esh* (also translated as “Righteous Shepherd”). Interestingly, *Esh* is also the name given to Adam and his descendants in vernacular Hebrew, and the name is translated as “Master of humankind”.<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>260</sup> De La Torre M. A. (2004) *Santeria: The Beliefs and Rituals of a Growing Religion in America*, p. 42

<sup>261</sup> see Dr. Lee Warren, B. A. (1999) *Male and Female Androgyny*, PLIM Report, Vol. 8 #3

<sup>262</sup> Shakesword F. (2010) *Lyric Poems from Around the World: Epic Thinks Beyond Feelings – Creation Story of the Yoruba (Folktale), Departure to the Ocean Way*, pp. 627, 628

<sup>263</sup> Acholonu C. and Davis S. (2013) *Eden in Sumer on the Niger: Archaeological, Linguistic and Recorded Evidence of 450,000 Years of Atlantis, Eden and Sumer in West Africa*, p. 104

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, Obatala is known as the “Protector of the Town Gates,” and he is portrayed in religious art as an equestrian warrior brandishing a spear. This particular manifestation once again identifies Obatala with Percival, as well as with the Welsh hero Peredur. In Chrétien's novel, Percival is encountered on more than one occasion in front of the Grail Castle. In one scene, Percival finds the gate of the Grail Castle open, and as he rides over the drawbridge, the drawbridge mysteriously lifts up on its own. In another, the drawbridge starts lifting while he is still on it so that his horse is only just able to jump across.<sup>264</sup> The scene is replicated in the Mabinogion, upon Peredur's arrival at the Castle of Wonders (City of Lights), as well as in Boorman's film *Excalibur*, which retells the the legend of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. In the Celtic romance, Peredur meets at the castle a young black girl — a literary metonym for the trickster god Esu disguised as a young black girl — as well as three knights whose names, Engygeron, Clamadeus, and Orgueilleus, are the etymological relatives of the Yoruba gods Egungun, Shango, and Ogun.<sup>265</sup>

Obatala, Percival, and Peredur, furthermore, can all be linked with Hecate, the Greek goddess of the Underworld. In Pythagorean esoteric tradition Hecate is the Gatekeeper and Keyholder of the sacred regions. She is the Lady of Tartaros, *Phulada* (“Guardian”), *Propulaia*, (“Before the Gates”), and *Kleidoukhos* (Key-holder).<sup>266</sup> As an Underworld goddess, Hecate is associated with fire, and called *Purphoros* (“Fire-bearing”), and is thus in art portrayed as holding a torch. As a logical consequence, she is associated with light, and is thus called *Phôsphoros* or *Lucifera* (“Light-bearer”).<sup>267</sup> In Igbo, the equivalent of Lucifer is *Ele-chi-ife*, meaning “Ele the Light Bearer,” “Ele who Bears the Light,” or “Ele, the God of Light, Brightness and Daylight”. If we substitute “V” in PAR-CE-V-AL with “F,” we get OPARA-CHI-IFE-ELE/ALA in Igbo, meaning “The Son of God/King/Lord Who Bears the Light of El/Earth”. We can see clearly now that Parceval/Perceval is the incarnate form of the Earth-God El, the Light Bearer, whom Igbo consider the God of Kindness and Open Doors.

Coincidentally, the Bible speaks of God's “multitude of loving kindnesses” (Isaiah 63:7), and that he has “set before you an open door, which no one is able to shut” (Revelation 3:8). The Bible also says that Lucifer is the Light Bearer, but also that God is Light and “Consuming Fire” (Deuteronomy 4:24). And the Bible says that “smoke pours out of God's nostrils, as out of a seething pot or caldron” (Job 41:20), presenting to the reader a stereotypical image of Satan (aka, the Devil) in popular culture.

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<sup>264</sup> Jung E. and Von Franz M. L. (1960) *The Grail Legend*, p. 71

<sup>265</sup> Carley J. P. and Riddy F. (1994) *Arthurian Literature*, p. 162

<sup>266, 267</sup> Opsopaus J. (1999) *Hecate The Key Holder and Light-bearing Hecate* – Biblioteca Arcana

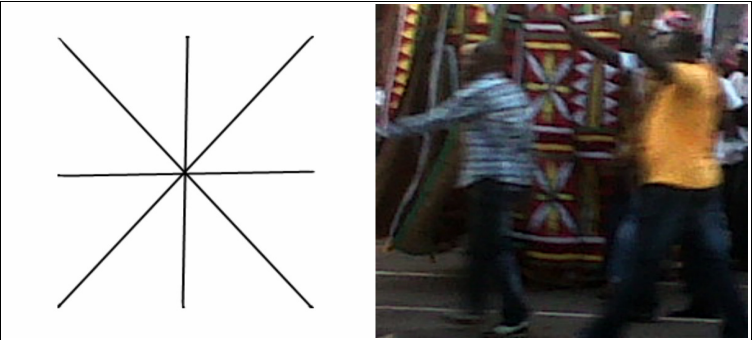


**Picture:** Thoth, the Egyptian god credited with the invention of spoken and written language. Courtesy: British Museum

In the Emerald Tablets, Thoth says that the Dweller in the Duat has the nature of Fire that subsists in Deep Darkness. *Du-At* derives from Igbo *Idu At/Atama*, meaning “The Black First Son of God”. Yoruba *Dudu* means “Black”. *Eri* is *Idu Eri*, a native of Eridu, which Sumerian texts say was the first city built by the gods on earth, where the members of Adam's family lived. Adam's descendants were, and still are, called *Adama* in the Igbo and Idoma languages, and *Atama* by the Edo and Igala people.<sup>268</sup> *Adam* was thus a form of *Ele* (Egyptian *Atum*), the aboriginal Earth-God, and

the father of the Apemen scribes of the Duat, whose Leader is Thoth – the god of scribes.<sup>269</sup>

**Picture:** the eightfold star symbol of the Khemennu/Khamanu Apemen, the scribes of the Egyptian Duat, of which Thoth is leader, is often portrayed on festival embroidery in rural Nigeria. Courtesy: Catherine Acholonu



We now face the shocking truth that “Ele the Light Bearer” — ELE-CHI-IFE/LUCIFER/PERCEVAL — is the only true God, which is to say, the original “God,” as conceived by aboriginal Africans, otherwise known as Atum the Earth Dweller (*Par-Atama* of Heliopolis – Igbo *Opara Adama*), which the Catholic Church has unfortunately labeled “the Devil”. In the Nag Hammadi Scriptures, however, Jesus revealed the true identity of the devil. And he confirmed this being as Enki, the Anunnaki colonizer. In the Hebrew Bible, Enki's alter ego is Yahweh, the god of the Israelites, whom Jesus calls: “A Liar and... a Murderer from the Beginning” (John 8:44). Enki/Yahweh is the one who slew Adam and all his descendants. Adam is thus the incarnation of Atum, Atum is Lancelot, Lancelot is Lucifer, Lucifer is Percival, Percival is Obatala, Obatala is Jesus, and Jesus is Christ, the owner of radiant white raiment (Luke 9:28). Thoth is the ninth member of the eight Khemennu (the Ogdoad). The Khemennu reflect Atum, who is the ninth member and Lord of the eight Unseen Ones of the Duat.

<sup>268</sup> Acholonu C. (2013) *The Discovery of the Ancient Egyptian City of Heliopolis and 'Temple of the Sun' in West Africa*, p. 22

<sup>269</sup> Acholonu C. (2011) *West-African Origin of Language: The Case of Igbo Discussions on a New York Times Article on the West African Origin of Modern Languages – “Sumerian /Semitic”*.



**Picture:** Byzantine artwork of the Transfiguration of Christ. Jesus is set on a mountain top and put before the eightfold Khemennu/Khamanu Star. Credit: Musée du Louvre

The number eight is a multipurpose key. In the Bible, the great vision of the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ is known as the mystery of the Eighth Day. Eight are the unseen ones in the Duat where Osiris is buried as Sokar, awaiting his resurrection. Accordingly, most Catholic theologians consider the transfiguration process a preview of the glorified body of Christ as following his resurrection. The eight Lords of the Duat correspond to the eight Meji of Ifa (*meji* means “androgynous”), which, multiplied, make a total of 16 *odu* (eight male and eight female), just as in the Emeralds Tablets of Toth.

The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ is the greatest miracle in Catholic tradition, and the setting on the mountain throne is presented as the point where (human) nature meets God: the meeting place of the temporal and the eternal, with Jesus as the connecting point, acting as the bridge between heaven and earth. According to Luke 9:28, the Transfiguration of Jesus Christ took place about eight days after Jesus' passion teaching. Holy devotion and Heavenly repose marked Jesus when he was transfigured before his disciples, as He stood in prayer, and spoke about purity and greatness.

*Eke okwu* (“holy eke”), which occurs every eight days of the Great Igbo Week, serves as a non-working day, in the same way as Sunday does for the Catholics. Among Nnobi people in Southeast Nigeria, this day is dedicated to Idemili, one of the Igbo water spirits who is also a cat goddess (Idemili means “Pillar of Waters,” or “Pyramid in the Water”). Harvesting on Idemili's day is considered an abomination. The Nnobi people have close cultural and historic ties with the Adama(s), who apparently have conferred on them the Ozo title. Handing over the Ozo stick is part of Ozo initiation. The *Nze na Ozo* society is the most important magico-religious and social grouping in Igbo society. The members of this society are the Christs among Igbo people. They do not commit sin, or tell a lie, or do any wrong to another human. They are the judges and *Durus* (“Lords of the society”). Jesus was an initiate into their mysteries. The cross in a circle, used regularly in representations of Jesus Christ, is the traditional Igbo symbol of the Ozo initiates of Igboland.<sup>270</sup>

<sup>270</sup> Information received from Professor Catherine Acholonu while writing this paper.

The Transfiguration of Jesus Christ is also reflected in the mock death, burial and resurrection rituals among the eze Nri's when they are crowned priest-kings. Tradition has it that, before coronation, a king from Eri lineage must first die, be buried, and then resurrect after three hours. Then he will be clad all in white (left shoulder wrap as worn by Jesus, Buddha, or Vishnu), seated on the throne and addressed as *Mmuo* (Deity), with the injunction to rule the world with justice, equity, and righteousness. The three hours used in the resurrection ritual of an eze Nri presage the Biblical passage related to the Resurrection of Jesus Christ: "...for as Jonah was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth;" (Matthew 12:38-40). Once again we learn that Jesus, in order to be reborn, must descend into the "Heart of the Earth," or better, into the Navel of the Earth, which is also the Navel of the Universe, which Sumerian records describe as two pyramids standing tip to tip like an hourglass.<sup>271</sup>

**Picture:** The entrance to a compound in Nnobi, Idemili area, Igboland, decorated with an X-shaped symbol of two pyramids standing tip to tip. Credit: Liz Willis.

The actual Navel of the Earth is a place called MEDIAN in all old maps of the world. That place is MEDIAN BIAFRA or BIAFRA MEDIAN (*Median* is a cartographic term meaning "center of a plane"). The actual location of the Median is Igboland in South-Eastern Nigeria!<sup>272</sup>



This very Navel of the Earth is located where two invisible pyramids stand tip to tip at the confluence of three sacred rivers: Niger/Omambala and Omambala/Ezu. That is the place of the Grail, and the holiest spot in all Igboland. Spirits come and go from there through an invisible tunnel that goes into the House of God/Chukwu (see Acholonu *Leija, The Discovery*). The invisible City of Light/Grail Castle is located under the present town of Aguleri, where Eri landed after the Deluge. The initiates of inner mysteries *Nze na Ozo* bear that X-shaped double-pyramid symbol as facial scarification from earliest times. They are the original custodians of the Grail Mystery. Thus the Grail is a symbol of the Navel of the Earth/Universe, represented by two pyramids joined at their tips, forming the characteristic chalice shape ("as above, so below").

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<sup>271, 272</sup> Acholonu C. and Davis S. (2013) *Eden in Sumer on the Niger: Archaeological, Linguistic and Recorded Evidence of 450,000 Years of Atlantis, Eden and Sumer in West Africa*

The search for the Sacred Grail has occurred in different epochs and in many lands. Even today it is believed that, if one drinks from the Sacred Grail, one will become immortal. However old legends differ, they agree in this: that the Sacred Grail has always been sought after with great trial. According to the various Grail legends, the search for the Sacred Grail, Grail Castle, and Grail Keeper require various heroes to pass one or more tests or challenges. This challenge or series of challenges is a form of initiation into the mysteries. Percival, for instance, after his first visit to the Grail Castle, had to search for five years before being allowed to heal the Fisher King and restore the fertility to the land. For most heroes of Grail legend, the search for the Sacred Grail remained an impossible quest and the Grail an unattainable mirage. In Boorman's *Excalibur*, the healing of Arthur occurs when Percival has a vision of the Grail during which he realises that Arthur and the land are one. At the Grail Castle, Percival finds Arthur “wasting away,” dead and not dead, dead in the flesh but alive in the spirit. In this scene, Arthur embodies the transitional phase between life and death, which a person enters when taking upon himself the spirit of the dead, and which, in Yoruba culture, is ritually invoked during *Egungun* worship (*Egungun* means “bone rises and resurrects”). It refers to the harvest festival of the Yoruba, which celebrates earth and its fertility, when the living are made more alive by the presence of the spirits of the dead.<sup>273</sup> When Percival gains the Grail and takes it to Arthur, who drinks from it and is finally revitalised – as is the land, which springs into blossom – this is able to occur because Percival *is* Arthur, both receiver and giver, the receptacle filled with essential life form, with sacred water from the heavenly ocean, the emblem of eternal life. Boorman's film is named after Arthur's famous sword Excalibur (“Sword of Liberty”). Its name derives from Igbo *Eshi Kwa Libiri* (*Eeshi* means Aborigin/god-man; *Kwa* are the descendant tribes of Eri; *Libiri* is Igbo for “break off from chains/bondage”). This sword is called *Makkel* in the Hebrew tradition and *Makk-esh* in the Egyptian tradition. It was the sword that archangel Michael wielded and was named after. Both names are derived from Igbo *Mmaka Eshi* and *Mmaka Ele* (*El*). *Mmaka* means “Sword/Hand/Knife” in Igbo. *Ele* and *Eshi* are Igbo names for the Earth-God and his aboriginal Earthling children, respectively.<sup>274</sup> “The Sword in the Stone” is the sword of the legendary high priest Okonfo Anochye, an ancient mystic of the Ashanti kingdom. The sword is still there today, in a stone in Kumasi, after the high priest stuck it there and disappeared. No one has been able to pull the sword out of the stone to this very day. The whole Arthurian story belongs to the Kwa tribes, all of whom are descendants of Eri, who established his kingdom in Igboland.

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<sup>273</sup> Adepegba C. O. (1995) *Osogbo: model of growing African towns*, p. 99 – I.A.S., University of Ibadan

<sup>274</sup> Acholonu C. and Davis S. (2013) *Eden in Sumer on the Niger*

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## Seeds of Civilization

According to Yoruba mythology the city of Ile-Ife in present-day Nigeria is the cradle of all human civilization. The Ife accounts agree in describing the descent from heaven of the first king of Ife, Oduduwa. He arrived on Ora hill with 16 sons, or princes, to share his task of colonizing the earth, after Olodumare had established land upon waters and Obatala had created the first humans. From the Oke Ora, they moved to a nearby place where the palace of the ruler still stands at the centre of the town. The place in Ife at which the sons' dispersal was decided is known as "The Place of Conference," Itajero.<sup>275</sup> The 16 sons of Oduduwa were given crowns and horses and sent away to establish new kingdoms. Sometimes the number of these princes is given as 16, elsewhere only seven. However, both numbers are firmly associated with chivalry in Arthurian literature. In *Bulfinch's Medieval Mythology: The Age of Chivalry*, a prose recounting of myths and stories which include King Arthur legends and medieval romances, we encounter Perceval fighting and defeating 16 knights, before they all go together to Arthur's Court.<sup>276</sup> The same event takes place in the Mabinogion, where Peredur, one of the seven sons of the Earl of Evrawc, overthrows in a shameful fashion 16 knights, before they all go to Arthur's Court.<sup>277</sup> The *Livre d'Artu*, which was written to replace one of the branches of the Vulgate Cycle, mentions Perceval's father, King Pellinor, who had 16 sons.<sup>278</sup> In another Celtic folktale, the knights are replaced by 16 giants, all of whom are defeated and sent as a pledge to Arthur's court.<sup>279</sup> Sixteen hundred are the knights able to sit at King Arthur's Round Table, first mentioned in Wace's *Roman de Brut*, published in 1155.<sup>280</sup> In Yoruba mythology, the first king of Ile-Ife sends his 16 sons to fetch ocean water to cure his blindness, after the oracle consulted the Ifa Platter of Truth and foretold that the ocean water was the only source of regeneration for his eyes. The 16 sons of Oduduwa gave Ile-Ife riding horses laden with provisions for seven days. Although in the end, only the youngest of the sons, named *Obokun*, returned with ocean water to cure the eyes of his father<sup>281</sup>, the story continually reiterates the number 16.

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<sup>275</sup> Sidney Smith R. (1969, 1976, 1988) *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, pp. 13, 14

<sup>276</sup> Bulfinch T. (1796–1867) *Bulfinch's Medieval Mythology: The Age of Chivalry*, p. 97

<sup>277</sup> Schreiber C. (1881) *The Mabinogion, from the Welsh of the Llyfr coch o Hergest*, p. 87

<sup>278</sup> Whitehead F. (1973) *Studies in Medieval Literature and Languages*, p. 62

<sup>279</sup> Loomis R. S., Champion H. (1927) *Medieval studies in memory of Gertrude Schoepperle Loomis*, p. 63

<sup>280</sup> Wace R. (1155) *Roman de Brut (Roman de Rou)*

<sup>281</sup> Shakesword F. (2011) *Lyric Poems from Around the World : Epic Thinks Beyond Feelings – Sixteen Sons of Oduduwa*, p. 577, 578

The creation account of Oduduwa and his 16 sons clearly underpins the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, specifically when the congregation of knights falls into disrepute, when Arthur himself becomes sick, and the kingdom becomes a wasteland. In Arthurian literature, the land can only be saved by finding the Sacred Grail. It is for this reason that the sick Arthur sends all his knights out to search for it. It has also become evident that the Ifa Platter of Truth embodies the Sacred Grail in one of its many different manifestations, especially when referred to as a dish from which spiritual food is served. According to Yoruba mythology, Ifa, the God of Divination, leaves to his children 16 palm nuts to consult the Ifa Platter of Truth in order to communicate with the spirit world and the gods.



**Picture:** divination tray Opon-Ifa; Yoruba people.<sup>282</sup> The carving very much resembles the Quaternary symbol discovered at the site of Bidzar, Cameroon, as well as many haloes in the Christian tradition.

According to Ifa, Obatala is the greatest of the 16 sons and daughters of God who came to redeem earth from the Evil One. Ifa also says that Obatala, whom the Yoruba worship as the ancestor of the Igbo and the greatest of all the Sons of God who have incarnated on earth, died and was resurrected after 16 days.<sup>283</sup> Ifa, as cited by Titi Euba, says that the great Igbo battle between Oduduwa and Obatala is the great mythical battle between Good and Evil. Ifa insists that Oduduwa was the leader of the foreigners (Anunnaki colonists), while Obatala was the leader of the Aboriginal Earthlings, whom Ifa calls “Igbo”.<sup>284</sup> In other words, the first world was formed in ancient Nigeria.

It must be pointed out that today there are two Ifa: Ifa Oduduwa, which according to Titi Euba was doctored by Oduduwa priests to transfer Obatala's achievements to Oduduwa, and Ifa Orishanla, which is the true, undoctored Ifa sourcebook. Professor Catherine Acholonu in her work connected Oduduwa with Yahweh (Enki son of Marduk), while his arch opponent Obatala is Toth/Ningishzidda (the arch enemy of Marduk in the Sumerian myths). As already demonstrated, in Igbo lore Obatala is a name for Eri, who incarnates Melchizedek, “the Deathless One,” represented by the figure of Jesus Christ celebrated as a “priest and righteous king” in the Epistle to the Hebrews.

<sup>282</sup> Bascom W. R. (1969) – *Ifa divination: communication between gods and men in West Africa*

<sup>283</sup> Acholonu C. (2011) – *Igbo language: A Former Global Lingua Franca and the Mother of Semitic Languages*

<sup>284</sup> Euba T. (1990) – *Ifa Literary Corpus as Source-Book of Yoruba History* – in Algoa

The notion of the “righteous priest-king” dates back to a time shortly after the Deluge, when Eri the creator god inaugurated kingship in Igboland and his sons became the first righteous kings in the new world. Chikodi Añunobi, author of *Nri Warriors of Peace*, explains that the Nri culture set out to create a holy precinct, or holy ground, where all human beings, no matter their gender or skin colour, could walk without fear of harassment or intimidation. For Nri people, all human beings are not only equal but sacred.<sup>285</sup> He also explains that at the heart of Nri culture lie the sacred principles of peace, tolerance, and non-violence. Indeed, the Kingdom of Nri could be defined as an anomaly in the history of world government. Its leaders never exercised military power over their people, and the kingdom was a secure refuge for those who had been rejected by their communities.

Nri was enthroned by his father Eri as the first king of the royal family tree. Seven years after becoming king (Eze), Nri created the Ozo priesthood. The first Ozo priests were his four sons and eight students (four plus eight makes 12). These “chosen ones” became Nri's disciples and the heads of the first 12 villages.<sup>286</sup> Afterwards, Nri created the movement of the Nze priests, who became apprentices or lifetime disciples to an Ozo priest. In Igbo, *Nze* means “guardian,” or “shepherd,” while *Ozo* means “saviour”.<sup>287</sup> This word identifies Nri culture as the primary source from which the Christian notion of Jesus Christ as a “savior,” “shepherd,” or “righteous king” sprang.

This is also true of the 12 Apostles, who were chosen by Jesus Christ to become his closest followers. Today, claims by citizens of the Nri city-state assert that the letters INRI found on the Cross is evidence that Jesus is a native of Nri. These claims are supported by the fact that Jesus was titled I-NRI — “Jesus-NRI” — by a knowing Pilate, and because NRI means “King of Righteousness,” a notion which, in exactly the same way as the etymological root word for “Christ,” *Chi* — the name of the spirit of God in Man — originated in Igboland.

As previously mentioned, the word “church” was derived from the Medieval English word *circe* or *kirce*, meaning “circle of stones,” or “circle of initiates,” and *circe* was originally derived from Igbo words *chiri echi*, meaning “initiated”. The word “circe” used among the Druids, and the word “Druids” itself was derived from *Duru Idu*, which means “Black Lords”.<sup>288</sup> It implies that the first Christians in Europe were Igbo speakers and that Merlin, who instituted Arthur's Round Table, was an Igbo Druid Lord. He was in fact one of the many incarnations of the Divine Human, Eri – the Igbo form of Thoth who instituted Afa/Ifa.

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<sup>285, 286, 287</sup> Añunobi C. (2006) *Nri Warriors of Peace*, pp. 44, 360

<sup>288</sup> An etymological reconstruction made by Professor Catherine Acholonu

And so we are facing the astonishing evidence that Eri was the original Merlin, called *Mel-Erin* (meaning “Eri the Black”; *Mel* also occurs in “melanin,” for instance). *Mel-Erin* (Merlin) means “Black God/Lord,” for in Irish tradition *Erin-Land*, from which “Ireland” was derived, comes from Igbo *Ala-ndi-Eri* (“Land of Eri People”). *Erin* (Eri) means God/Spirit in Irish, Yoruba, Benin and Igbo all descended from the Eri dynasty based in Igboland, Nigeria.<sup>289</sup> Merlin, who is known as the advisor who helps King Arthur through the early years of his reign, has become the best-known magician of all time. Merlin was the son of no man and a mother who knew not his father. Merlin's close relationship with Arthur suggests that together they make a composite figure — the magician being the divine spiritual self and the king the bodily self.

In *Lancelot Grail: The Story of Merlin*, a major source of Arthurian legend written in French in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century, four are the knights sent to King Arthur's court to become prisoners.<sup>290</sup> Eight are the knights (in Malory's *The Book of Merlin And The Coming of Arthur*) who shall die or get imprisoned.<sup>291</sup> Sixteen are the knights of King Ban in *The Lancelot-Grail* who had done better than all others. These 16 had fought wonderfully and would be highly praised.<sup>292</sup> And, 32 in all are knights in *The Lancelot-Grail* who were the best knights who had died in combat for King Arthur. Moreover, 16 is the number of line stanzas in *Sir Perceval of Galles*, a Middle English Arthurian verse romance telling a part of Chrétien's *Perceval* arranged in a way so that every stanza is linked to the one preceeding it and also follows a precise metrical pattern.<sup>293</sup> These 16-line stanzas, and all the aforementioned numbers of knights, correspond to the Ifa binary counting system, in which 16 palm nuts are used in the configuration of fixed literary verses that the numerical signs signify. As in Ifa divination, in Grail literature, numbers and verse texts have highly metaphorical and often enigmatic meanings. Afa binaries count in square roots of four, as well. The basic Afa thread bears four seeds, each with two faces (concave and convex, totaling eight). There are a total of four Afa threads, each with four Afa seeds, making 16 seeds. Each seed has two faces (convex and concave), totaling 32. Each has an Afa name and meaning.

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<sup>289</sup> An etymological reconstruction made by Professor Catherine Acholonu during our discussions on the origins of the Grail figures.

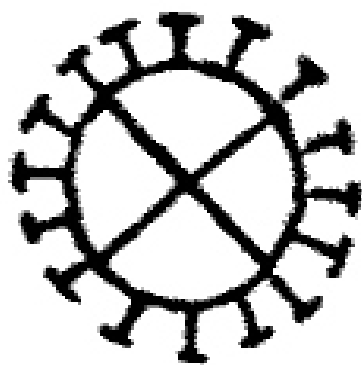
<sup>290</sup> Lacy N. J. (2010) *Lancelot-Grail, The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation, The Story of Merlin*, p. 490

<sup>291</sup> Rhys E. (1886) *Malory's history of King Arthur and the Quest of the Holy Grail*, p. 13

<sup>292</sup> Goodrich P. H. and Thompson R. H. (2003) *Merlin: A Casebook*, p. 310

<sup>293</sup> Malone K. and Baugh A. C. (1948, 1967) *The Literary History of England, Vol. 1: The Middle Ages (to 1500)*, p. 192

Most people may not know the Afa names and meanings, but Afa priests, Dibias, generally know them. Dibias are diviners and traditional healers who are empowered mediators between the material and spiritual realms of reality. They are also the timekeepers of the traditional Igbo calendar, based on a four-day week, a month made of seven weeks (28 days), and a year made of 13 months. The Igbo calendar is based on the moon's, not the sun's, cycles. It is used to fix cultural events such as new and full moon festivals, including the ancient harvest festival *Igu Aro*, during which the Eze Nri gives out yam seedlings to heads of Ndigbo communities with the exhortation: “Go, plant, feed your families and kindred”.<sup>294</sup> Nri tradition thus once again recalls the parable of sowing and reaping as paraphrased by Chrétien de Troyes in the opening of his prologue in *Perceval*, as well as in Biblical verses involving farming life used as a metaphor for death and resurrection.



**Fig. 10:** Nsibidi pictograph for “Moon” (Igbo *Onwa*), characterized by the cross in the circle and 16 T-shaped pillars.<sup>295</sup>

In Yorubaland also, the month is based on cycles of the lunar phases. In Benin, the Bini have a society named *Iwo-Uki* (the Rising Moon), whose duty it is to supervise the lunar cycles, the sun, and the stars, and to inform the people about the times for various festivities, the times for planting, weeding, and harvesting.<sup>296</sup> The lunar cycle, which normally falls within one full month, lasts four native Igbo weeks or 16 days. Thus, the 16-day period composes the lunar cycle from the new moon to the full moon. In Igbo, the moon is called *Onwa*, and people refer to it as *Oma*, the mother of all humanity. They also refer to the moon as *Omagba* (“Oma's home”), the place where the first Igbo people dwelled before planet Earth was formed. *Oma* is also the root word for *Soma*, a Sanskrit term for the moon, as well as the Vedic ritual drink (and the plant from which it is obtained) in India. In Vedic tradition, the *Soma* drink has been called the “Elixir of Immortality”. It is celebrated in the Rig Veda and Avesta as *Haoma*. The term *Soma* is further linked to the Igbo word *Usoma*, meaning “pleasant taste,” or “sweet pleasure,” a mystical notion Igbo people have ascribed to the intoxicating influence of the moon.<sup>297</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> see Chukwudi Nwokoye's article *Igu Aro Ndi Igbo*

<sup>295</sup> Zaslavsky C. (1973) *Africa Counts: Number and Pattern in African Cultures*, Chapter 18

<sup>296</sup> An Nsibidi pictograph for “Moon” as recorded by Elphinstone Dayrell. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, Vol. 41 (July – December, 1911), pp. 521–540

<sup>297</sup> Chukwukadibia E. N. (2014) *Leopards of the Magical Dawn: Science and the Cosmological Foundations of Igbo Culture*

**Fig. 11:** Sixteen nityas (or *tithis*) which are related to the fifteen phases of the moon. Courtesy: Mike Magee (1996)

In the ancient Vedic tradition, the number 16 is associated with the power of Shiva, known as the “Girl of Sixteen”. Shiva's consort was *Uma* (which is another etymological relative of *Oma*). *Uma* was the incarnation of *Sati*, one of the daughters of the early Vedic God, Daksha. Tradition has it that devotees of Shiva keep a fast on 16 consecutive Mondays, which may be interpreted as a practice to reach spiritual perfection. There are 16 sutras (verses) in the ancient mathematical system of the Vedas which, like Afa/Ifa, are an endless source of knowledge and wisdom, providing practical knowledge in all spheres of life. And 16 are the nitya-s or eternities of Lalita Devi (the Divine Mother) connected with the phases of the moon, and the number of that corresponds to the 16 Sanskrit vowels.



**Picture:** illustration of a 1634 copy of *Le Morte D'Arthur*. King Arthur sits in the center of the table surrounded by his men in arms.<sup>298</sup>

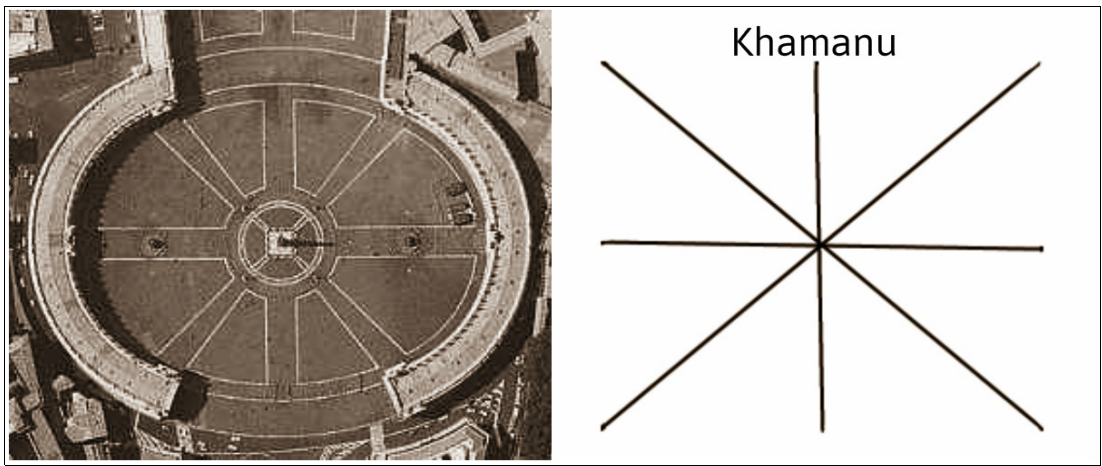
The Nsibidi pictograph for the moon, and the nitya-s number 16, correspond further to the Round Table in Arthurian literature. In the illustration, we see Arthur placed at the center of the table surrounded by his men in arms. The illustration, however, shows 15 instead of 16 figures. This is explained by Vedic cosmology where the number 15 refers to the fifteen *kala-s* (“times”), or *viryam* (seeds), of the waxing moon, and the sixteenth *kala* is seen as one with Lalita, the deity Herself. King Arthur thus embodies the visible but also invisible essence of the Great Mother symbolized by the full moon. Although in Arthurian literature the moon is humanised by Arthur's wife Guinevere, in many episodes the king himself is compared to the full moon (e.g., while riding into the battle “all shining in white and glittering fine armor, wherefore he resembled the full moon in harvest season”<sup>299</sup>).

<sup>298</sup> Stansby W. (1634) *The Most Ancient and Famous History of Arthur* (Douce A 279, frontispiece).

<sup>299</sup> Pyle H. (1903) *The Story of King Arthur and his knights, King Arthur Rides to Battle*, p. 94–95

The full moon also played a critical role in the building of temples. The nexus of the full moon and the building of the Temple in the reign of Solomon is elaborated in kabbalistic literature.<sup>300</sup> According to Jewish mysticism, spiritual perfection occurs 15 generations after Abraham, when Solomon was enthroned in the temple. The moment of the enthronement thus parallels the fifteenth lunar cycle, when the disc of the moon becomes full.<sup>301</sup> In traditional Wiccan religion, erecting the temple is a ritual performed during full moon celebrations. The practice consists of drawing a circle on the ground, marking a line on the boundary of the circle, lighting some candles, sprinkling consecrated water within the sacred space, then worshipping it as dictated by tradition.<sup>302</sup>

All the mentioned information becomes particularly compelling when analyzing the sacred geometry of the Vatican in Rome, Italy. The Vatican, was conceived by several architects including Gianlorenzo Bernini who completed the works during the Baroque period. After the great dome of St. Peter's Basilica designed by Michelangelo was finished, Bernini created among other architectural masterpieces the famous and massive St. Peter's Square, also known as *Piazza Obliqua*.



**Picture:** aerial view of the *Piazza Obliqua* ; and the eight-rayed star symbol of the *Khamanu*

The *Piazza*, an oval section enclosed between two semicircular colonnades, displays the form of the eight-rayed star symbol of the *Khemennu*, occurring in common Igbo language as *Khamanu*, which refers to the Landlords of the Earth. Catherine Acholonu explains that *Khem*, from which *Khemet*, meaning “Land of the Blacks,” is derived, in the Egyptian language came from *Khemennu*, which means “Cavemen” or “Ape-men”. *Khemennu* is in turn derived from the Igbo word *Oke Mmanu*, which means “Land Deity has created a Human Being,” and thus refers to the Earth Mother and her womb.

<sup>300</sup> see Moses de León, *Shushan 'Edut*, Cf. *Zohar* 2:145b  
<sup>301</sup> Breslauer D. S. (1997) *The Seductivness of Jewish Myth, Challenge or Response*, p. 257  
<sup>302</sup> Macmorgan-Douglas K. (2008) *The Circle Cubed: Erecting the Temple in Four Dimensions*, p. 1



Indeed, the image of the *Piazza Obliqua* reminds us of the oblong shape of the uterus during pregnancy, while the collonades focusing on the Vatican obelisk resemble the fallopian tubes. Bernini himself declared: “Because the church of St. Peter's is like the womb that generates other churches, she had to have a portico that shows how she maternally opens her arms to Catholics to confirm them in their beliefs, heretics to reunite them with the Church, and infidels to illuminate them in the true faith”.<sup>303</sup> For Bernini, the role of the Church as Mother of all churches was explicitly stated in his *giustificazione* for the construction of *Piazza Obliqua*.<sup>304</sup>

It should be also remembered that from the Renaissance onwards, Gnosticism laid intellectual and spiritual foundations in society, and that the agglomeration of various religious traditions was the central purpose of Christian Gnosticism. At the time, Gnostics were the intellectual aristocracy of the Church, and the redefinition of pagan archetypes in a Catholic context was specifically promoted by Pope Alexander VII.<sup>305</sup> The idea of the Mother Earth from whose womb emerges all life was a true catalyst for the architectural conception of the Vatican city-state.

In Igbo the Womb of the Mother Goddess is called *Mgba Nnechukwu* (*Mgba* means “womb,” *Nnechukwu* means “mother goddess”). *Nnechukwu* is primarily associated with *Oma*, the goddess of the moon, whom Professor Catherine Acholonu linked with the sacred river Omambala. The word *Oma-Mbala* translates as “Oma's Square”.<sup>306</sup> Symbols associated with the mother goddess combine the cross within the circle as in *Onwa* (Moon), or the cross (or X) joined into a square, the pictograph for the Sumerian word *Magan* (the ancient name for Nigeria).<sup>307</sup>

The equal-armed cross without or within a circle or square adopted by Templars and Gnostics is the representation of the Son inside the Womb of the Mother Goddess. Both variations of the symbol are associated with the four rivers of the garden of Eden, as well the four rivers that converge in the Duat. According to the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*, this “Heaven,” where the sun rises and sets, was close to a body of water referred to it as a “Bight,” said to be located within the vicinity of a confluence of two rivers. The only Bights on the African continent are “Bight of Biafra” and “Bight of Benin,” both within Nigerian border's. The confluence of two Great rivers is the Niger/Benue confluence located not too far from Nsukka. In other words, the Heaven of the ancient Egyptians was in Nigeria.

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<sup>303</sup> Gallico S. (2007) *Rome and Vatican City – a complete guide with itineraries*, p, 210

<sup>304, 305</sup> Napier D. A. (1992) *Foreign Bodies: Performance, Art, and Symbolic Anthropology, Bernini's Anthropology: A Key to the Piazza San Pietro*, pp. 112-119

<sup>306, 307</sup> Acholonu C. (2013) *The Discovery of the Ancient Egyptian City of Heliopolis and Temple of the Sun in West Africa*; and Umeh J. (1991) *Igbo People Their Origin and Culture Area*

**Picture:** Ala, the earth goddess portrayed embracing children. The Raskin Privat Collection. Courtesy: Vera Raskin

Bernini's famous *Piazza Obliqua* with the colonnades symbolizing the arms of the Mother Church hides a clear reference to yet another manifestation of *Nnechukwu*, the most highly revered deity in Igbo culture, Ala, the earth goddess. Ala is understood as a model of the family, and is often portrayed with open arms and legs embracing children in sign of protection. She is put on display in Mbari shrines together with other deities, but always at the centre like an African Madonna.<sup>308</sup> In Igbo ALA means "Earth," ELE means God, the Son of the Earth. Parcev-ALA is both the Mother Earth and her Son – the androgynous pair with the same name. The traditional belief is that the souls of the dead reside in her sacred womb.



In one of her many artistic representations put on display in Mbari shrines (picture left <sup>309</sup>), Ala is portrayed with oval-shaped arms resembling very much the colonnades of *Piazza Obliqua*, and with a belly in the shape of a circle with a dot in the center, the symbol of the Point of the Sun, or *Punctus Solis*, the seed from which the Sun God is created as a spark of divine consciousness. In Igbo tradition, the mirrors in Ala's headdress represent the all-seeing god, who sees beyond anything, as it is reflective. The five mirrors, however, also directly involve the Egyptian concept of the five parts of man, related to the human being as made up of five different elements: *Ba*, *Ka*, *Akh*, *Ren*, and *Shwt*.<sup>310</sup> In ancient esoteric doctrines, the symbol for the five different parts or elements of man is the pentagon. The pentagon embodies the natural order of the elements: Fire, Air, Water, Earth, and Spirit. The notion of the five elements is the creative idea behind Leonardo Da Vinci's *Vitruvian Man*, depicting a male figure superimposed simultaneously in a circle and square representing the union between spirit and matter.

<sup>308</sup> Andrews T. (1998) *Dictionary of Nature Myths: Legends of the Earth, Sea, and the Sky*, p. 9

<sup>309</sup> A typical representation of Ala the earth goddess in Mbari art. Source: *African Research – The Hunt for Mbari Art*

<sup>310</sup> Djurdjevic N. M. (2012) *The Ancestral Origin of Stecaks*, pp. 24, 36–37

Ala's belly clearly reflects the central section of the *Piazza Obliqua* marked by the Vatican Obelisk, brought from Heliopolis in Egypt to Rome by Emperor Caligula ca. 40 AD. The symbolism incorporated into the Gnostic navel at the center of the eight-rayed star symbol of the Khamanu is very powerful. Besides the mathematical models related to African binary divination systems based on the mystical number four, and a sacred symbolism closely related to the Mother Goddess and her spiritual and cosmological manifestations, the structure particularly emphasizes the Nsibidi pictograph for congress (Igbo *Otu*).<sup>311</sup> The Nsibidi pictograph for congress establishes a direct link between the Gnostic navel and the legendary “Place of Conference” in Ife, for which Ifa says to be the place where the world began, from where the 16 sons of Oduduwa were sent away to establish new kingdoms, and from where Obatala, the creator and saviour of men, came to redeem earth from the Evil One.



**Picture:** view onto the navel of *Piazza Obliqua* (left); the Nsibidi pictograph for congress (right)

The pervasiveness of African mythological archetypes in Catholic contexts is exemplified by the Great Commission of a resurrected Jesus who says: “Go and make disciples of all nations...” (Matthew 28:19). Although the full text of the most familiar version of the Great Commission is recorded in Matthew 28:16–20, it is also found in other Gospel texts with some slight variations. However, in each instance Jesus sends his followers out with specific instructions, exactly as Oduduwa did with his sixteen sons. According to the Bible, Jesus and his disciples, in exactly the same way as Obatala, came for the purpose of “casting out demons” (Mark 16:15–18).

Still today, in the holy city of the Yorubas, stands an ancient sun clock made of a triangular monolith around which a circle has been drawn. The circle is divided into 16 parts, and the position of the shadow in relation to the circle indicated, in earlier days, the time of the observance of certain festivals. These 16 divisions correspond to the 16 Wind Rose markers on the circled cross surrounding the Vatican Obelisk, and these markers also denote compass directions to, or azimuths of, places that are historically or spiritually important to those who practice the Catholic Christian faith.

<sup>311</sup> Thompson R. F. (2010) *Flash of the Spirit: African & Afro-American Art & Philosophy*, p. 245

The symbolic meaning of numbers embedded within the body of the Gnostic navel is particularly significant as well. There are 16 granite bollards placed around the Vatican Obelisk, 16 white marble markers, which show the different wind or compass directions, four seven-branched candelabra (six around one <sup>312</sup>) totaling 28, and 68 short granite posts marking the traffic-free circle. The sum of these numbers is 128. One hundred and twenty-eight are the knights sent by King Laudegraunce and Merlin to Arthur's first Round Table <sup>313</sup>, and 128 did King Arthur knight at the great feast.

Even if we deduct the number 28 as a sum of four seven-branched candelabra added to the navel by Pope Pius IX in the 1800's, the mathematical magic based on the number four does not end here. In the *Lancelot-Grail*, 100 is the number of the “King of the Hundred Knights,” also called the “King of the Land Beyond the Borders,” and “Lord of the Land” of Estrangort, who was so called because he never went riding outside his own land without a following of 100 knights.<sup>314</sup>

Even if we deduct another 28 from 100, which makes 72, we will find out that 72 is the number of knights of the Round Table who follow Arthur in the most fearsome of all battles, the one against Sir Mordred, the traitor.<sup>315</sup> The episode of Mordred usurping the throne of King Arthur, beyond doubt reflects the fight between Obatala and Oduduwa over the right to rule the City of Light established by Eri in Igboland. Seventy-two are the disciples sent by Jesus Christ into the world to subdue demons and to tread upon serpents.<sup>316</sup> And, 72 in all are the names of God according to Kabbalah, derived from the verses of Exodus 14:19-21, where each verse numbers 72 letters. These letters represent the 72 people of the Earth, a number derived from the list of Noah's descendants in Genesis, who also were the master-masons who tried to build the Tower of Babel. Evidence for the biblical account is found among the Edda in Igboland. Edda is a clan and village constituted by exactly 72 subvillages, presumed to have descended from 72 priestly families at some time in the distant past.<sup>317</sup> It should therefore come as no surprise that even the political organization of Edda society is established on a structure consisting of four parts: *Ezi* (family), *Ogo* (village), *Isi-Ogo* (town), and *Nguzu-Osisioma* (federal level).

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<sup>312</sup> 6 + 1 conceptualizes the first seven words of Genesis when Elohim created the heavens and the earth.

<sup>313</sup> Withaker M. (1984) *Arthur's Kingdom of Adventure: The World of Malory's Morte Darthur*, p. 45

<sup>314</sup> Lacy N. J. (2010) *Lancelot-Grail, The Old French Arthurian Vulgate and Post-Vulgate in Translation, Vol. 3*, p. 181

<sup>315</sup> Lacy N. J. (2010) *Lancelot-Grail, The death of Arthur*, p. 123

<sup>316</sup> Kohlenberger J. R. (1982) *The Evangelical Parallel New Testament: Featuring Eight Popular Modern Translations Side by Side*, p. 458

<sup>317</sup> Godwin B. A. (2013) *Cow without a Tail, Book 1*, p. 277

According to the Table of Nations (Genesis 10–11), each of the 72 tribes or people of the Earth were spread from Babel throughout the world and divided into different nations and language groups. For instance, the Sumerian word *Babel* means “Gate to El’s House,” whose Igbo equivalent is *Baa be Ele*, meaning “Entrance to Ele’s House”.<sup>318</sup> *Ele* is the male aspect of *Ala*, the Earth-goddess, as well the most ancient god of the Igbo autochthons. The 72 people of the Earth who descended from Noah after the Deluge are thus the children of *Ele*, the Earthdweller. Igbo-Ukwu town is standing on the City of Light that Obatala/Eri built shortly after the Deluge in Igboland. According to the Book of Jubilees, *Ham*, the second oldest of three sons of Noah, was the builder of the first city after the Deluge. *Ham* is *Khem*, the “Black,” but *Khem* is also the name of the god whom the Greeks called Osiris. Obatala's title is *Oshere Igbo* in Yoruba Ifa. *Oshere* is Igbo *Oshuru*, which means “Sacred Groove,” so Obatala is Osiris—the Risen Christ—whose body is the Earth.<sup>319</sup>



**Picture:** Dürer A. (c. 1511), *Virgin and a child seated on a pillow on a crescent moon*, centred on the Sun (left); the Celestial Disc inside a crescent-shaped pile in the Lejja *Oshuru* shrine at Dunu Oka (right). The Celestial disc made of black iron slag marks the Gate to the Underworld. Picture © Pamela Eze-Uzoamaka.<sup>320</sup>

In Christian mysticism, the number 72 is also linked with the female aspect of the androgynous god, the figure of the Virgin Mary (see Hepburn J. B., *Virga Aurea*, Rome, c. 1616). Depictions of the virgin-goddess often include a conjunction of the sun and the moon, in which the moon, by mirroring the sun's light, “gives birth” to the sun god. The Christian sun-mythos, which reflects the headsets that Isis, Horus, and Osiris wore, all derived from the Table of the Sun in Lejja.

<sup>318</sup> Acholonu C. (2011) *West-African Origin of Language: The Case of Igbo Discussions on a New York Times Article on the West African Origin of Modern Languages - “Sumerian /Semitic”*.

<sup>319</sup> Professor Catherine Acholonu explains that the sacred groove is the gate to the underworld. It is called *Onu* in Igbo, meaning “opening into the earth” (AN in Egyptian, and ON in the Bible). The Grail Castle that Perceval (Obatala) saw was the reflection of the invisible City of Light located in the Underworld in Igboland.

<sup>320</sup> Acholonu C. (2013) *The Discovery of the Ancient Egyptian City of Heliopolis and 'Temple of the Sun' in West Africa*



The alleged existence of an earth dwelling god and underground heaven is also supported by the biblical story of Israel's King Saul, who went to consult a medium to conjure up the dead soul of Samuel the prophet. The Old Testament says that King Saul went in disguise to the Witch of Endor, to find out what would happen to him and to Israel, which was at war with the Philistines. When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice; and the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul." The king replied to her, "Do not be afraid; but what do you see?" And the woman said, "I see God ascending out of the earth." And Saul replied, "What is his form?" And the medium said, "an old man is coming up, and he is wrapped with a robe." Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he bowed to the ground in sign of reverence." (1 Samuel 28:13 ).

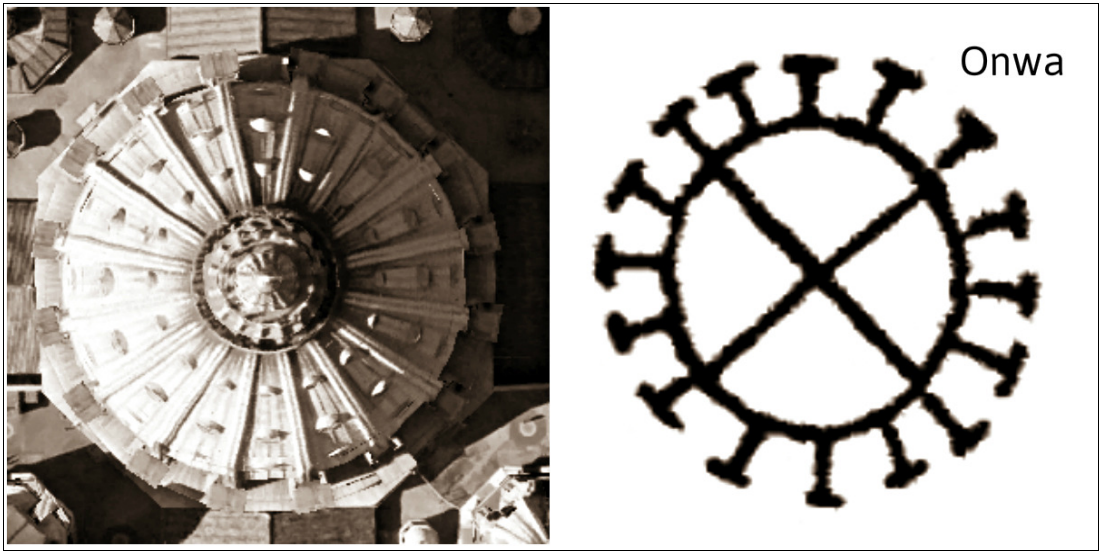
The symbolical deception of the medium and consequent resurrection of the Prophet Samuel seem to allude to a shapeshifting alter ego of King Saul. In other words, the story suggests that King Saul is both himself and Samuel the prophet. This assumption is supported by analogous events in the Bible related to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Mary Magdalene and the apostles have trouble recognizing Jesus after his resurrection preceded by a great earthquake (Matthew 28). The Bible does not specifically tell us why the followers of Jesus did not always recognize Him after his resurrection. However, as in the case of King Saul and Samuel the prophet, one reasonable explanation might be the ability of the Risen One to shapeshift which transcends human identity and gender boundaries. The Old Testament also says that Saul, after committing suicide by falling on his own sword, went to Heaven to be with Samuel (Matthew 14:27). Now we know that Samuel was one of the greatest prophets of God, and if there was no heaven under the earth, then even the greatest prophet of God must have been dwelling in hell. What seems much more plausible is that Heaven exists inside the Earth, while Saul, in spite of committing suicide, joined Samuel in Heaven. The existence of an underground heaven was also suggested by Jonah, one of the minor prophets in the Hebrew Bible, who preached: "To the roots of mountains I sunk down; the earth beneath barred me in forever. But you, Lord of my God, brought up my life from the pit" (Jonah 2:6).

Samuel the prophet ascending out of the earth as an "old man with a robe" reflects Obatala, usually regarded as an older man with a beard and wearing white robes. Next to Obatala stands Shango, the god of thunder and lightning, who represents the Yoruba conception of the manifestation of "the wrath of Olodumare".<sup>321</sup> Shango appears in the Bible as the angel of lightning wearing a robe as white as snow and sent by the Lord to roll away the stone from the tomb of Jesus (Matthew 28:2).

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<sup>321</sup> Okehie-Okoffa M. U. and Sadiku M. N. O. (1996) *Ethnic and Cultural Diversity in Nigeria*, p. 128

The crowning architectural glory of the Vatican is St. Peter's Basilica with its majestic dome designed by Michelangelo Buonarotti, who took over the project in 1547 at age 72. When construction began, Michelangelo built the dome's base, called the drum, surrounded by 16 ribs that are supported by four massive pillars. Sixteen double-engaged pillars were added to the outside of the dome and its lantern, as well as 16 double-engaged pillars on the inside of the dome and its lantern — which makes two time 64.<sup>321</sup> The triangular spaces where the pillars meet the dome's ceiling are decorated with mosaics depicting the four evangelists, surmounted by a lantern with 16 windows. Above is a blue sky with two circles of 16 stars each, and a central crown with 16 pillar symbols reflecting the dome's vaulting with 16 ribs.



**Picture:** the great dome of St. Peter's Basilica (left); the Nsibidi pictograph for moon (right).

Numerically, geometrically, and symbolically, Michelangelo's dome was derived from the universal binary language of Afa/Ifa, based on the number four and its multiplies, as well as the Igbo calendar system, which is a mathematical model of the order in nature. Since many parts of the Igbo calendar are named or dedicated to certain spirits (*mmuo*) and deities (*alusi*), we can surmise that the Four Evangelists are derived from the four spirits of the Igbo market days, who gave to the Igbo the knowledge of time. The dome's vaulting and central crown of the ceiling are the reflection of the Nsibidi pictograph for *Onwa* (Moon), characterized by the Quaternary and 16 T-shaped pillars. Sixty-four pillars correspond with the 64 root words of the 16 mystical “seeds” of Afa, the mystical science standing behind *Afa Akpukpala*, the primordial divination system employed since time immemorial in determining and addressing all phenomena in human life and the natural world.<sup>322</sup>

<sup>321</sup> Christiane L. Joost Gaugier (2012) *Italian Renaissance Art: Understanding its Meaning*

<sup>322</sup> Umeh J. A. (1997) *After God is Dibia: Igbo cosmology, divination & sacred science in Nigeria*, p. 6



Beneath Michelangelo's majestic dome, Bernini created a spectacular papal altar characterized by four large twisted columns supporting a triumphal bronze canopy. The high altar, built upon the alleged tomb of St. Peter, is placed at the center of a ceremonial area distinguished by a mosaic floor of elaborate decoration and a sacred symbolism mirroring the basic design of both the *Piazza Obliqua* and the great dome. The star symbol of the ceremonial area from which radiate 16 rays contains a variety of sacred motifs, which are the arrangements of the number four and its multiples commonly found in African cultural and spiritual tradition. Beside various cruciforms and eight-rayed star symbols which already had been explained, we find another symbol of the utmost importance: the stylized Nsibidi pictograph for “Mother” (*Nne* in Igbo).



**Picture:** Bernini's *baldachino*. Credit: L'Osservatore Romano. The Nsibidi pictograph for “Mother” (right)

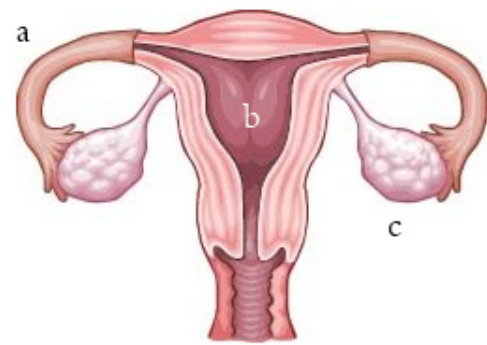
The Nsibidi pictograph for *Nne*, whose shape actually represents the female reproductive system, is often combined with other geometric motifs associated with the Mother Goddess and her womb, such as two concentric circles, referred to as *annulus*, or an X with sides joined into a square or circle. The symbol for *Nne* is also used as a decorative border on the official insignia of the Vatican City State, as well as the Coat of Arms of the Holy See, where it is portrayed in the bows of the crossed keys (associated with St. Peter), turned down to allude to the spiritual authority of the pope on earth.<sup>323</sup> The symbol for Mother can be also seen on artistic representations of the Maltese Cross associated with the Knights Hospitaller found in the Co-Cathedral of St. John in Valletta, as well as within the ornate rose window above the western entrance of the Rosslyn Chapel in Scotland.<sup>324</sup>

<sup>323</sup> see the official website of The Holy See – <http://w2.vatican.va/content/vatican/en.html>

<sup>324</sup> Mann F. M. (2006) *The Templar Meridians: The Secret Mapping of the New World*, Fig. 1.4.



### The female reproductive system



- a) Fallopian tubes
- b) Uterus
- c) Ovaries

**Picture:** Example of the Maltese Cross from St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valleta, Malta (left); the three female internal reproductive organs often used pictorially in association with the Mother Goddess (right).

The Maltese Cross, exactly as the artistic decorations of the Vatican, displays a symbolism referring to the female reproductive organs associated with the Womb of the Mother Goddess. As the Igbo-Ukwu Grail, it also displays the Canaanite letter Ain (as in Ain Soph — “God”), depicted in the form of intertwined cords or serpents. Moreover, the four arrow-shaped arms of the cross are symbolic of another manifestation of the Mother Goddess: the water spirit Idemili, the primary goddess of the Nnobi people who is invoked for childbearing and healing.

Legend has it that Idemili descended to the earth in a pillar of waters that rose from a sacred lake <sup>325</sup>, and brought down the mystic bag *Akpa Agwu* (*akpa* means “bag,” while *Agwu* is the spirit that controls divination, diviners and medicine). Idemili's mystic bag is associated with the life-giving amniotic sac (or bag of waters) in which the fetus develops and grows, while her sacred waters of creation establish a symbolic link with the amniotic fluid responsible for fetal nutrition and neonatal health. Idemili thus impersonifies the notion of *Nne Miri* (“Mother Water”) <sup>326</sup>, and *Mmiri Omumu* (“water the birth giver”). <sup>327</sup> From *mmili/mili*, pronounced *mmiri/miri* in autochthonous Igbo, derived Mary/Maria, the name of the mother of Jesus in Christian tradition. <sup>328</sup>

<sup>325</sup> Achebe Ch. (1964) *Arrow of God*, Chapter 4

<sup>326</sup> Achebe Ch. (2008) *Things Fall Apart*, London: Heinemann

<sup>327</sup> Talbot P.A. (1967) *Tribes of the Niger Delta: Their Religions and Customs*

<sup>328</sup> Acholonu C. and Davis S. L. (2013) *Eden in Sumer on the Niger*, Chapter 19

**Fig. 12:** The Nsibidi pictograph for *Idemili* (literally “pillar of water.”) The vertical lines are symbolic of *ide* (“pillar”), while the four arrows pointing up symbolize *mili/miri* (“water”). The four arrow-shaped arms of the Maltese Cross (interchangeably portrayed inside a square or circle) are symbolic of Idemili's elemental square saucer or base of a pyramid divided into four equilateral triangles.



According to myth, Idemili's pillar holds up the rain clouds and the roof of the sky <sup>329</sup>, while the elemental square saucer of the goddess symbolizes her watery primeval womb. In African sacred art, avatars of the goddess are sometimes shown as a female head with two strands of plaited hair representing the duality of the male and female principles. She is what ancient Igbo call *Isi-Isi* (“Head of all Heads”), from which derived *Isis*, the name of the Egyptian mother goddess.<sup>330</sup> In the Basilica of St. Peter's, Idemili's mythical imagery is portrayed by four large serpentine columns supporting the bronze baldachin above Bernini's papal altar. The four twisted columns (also known as Solomonic columns) symbolize Idemili's spiritual body climbing through the elemental square, the Tree of Life guarded by the androgynous serpent goddess known from Sumerian records as Tiamat.



**Picture:** Floor mosaic in the Choir Chapel of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. Credit: Basilica of St. Peter's

Amazingly, in St. Peter's Basilica we also find the symbol of the Navel of the Earth or Universe represented by two pyramids standing/touching tip to tip like an hourglass/chalice. As mentioned earlier, it is the symbol of Idemili's invisible pyramid inside the Omambala square lake at the confluence of three sacred rivers: Niger/Omambala and Omambala/Ezu. This is the original symbol of the Sacred/Holy Grail, which is carved into traditional Igbo door panels and can be seen as a decorative motif on compound entrances dedicated to the tutelary deity *Eke*, the royal python who serves as a totemic symbol and messenger of Idemili. *Eke*, however, is also the name of the first day of the four-day Igbo week, as well as the female consort of *Chi* — Christ — which is responsible for the absorption of the soul that will reincarnate into a new baby in the womb of the Mother Goddess.

<sup>329</sup> Ehling H. J. (1991) *Critical Approaches to Anthills of the Savannah*, p. 49  
<sup>330</sup> Acholonu C. and Davis S. L. (2012) *Eden in Sumer on the Niger, Chapter 19*  
<sup>331</sup> Udobata R. Onunwa (2010) *A Handbook of African Religion and Culture*, pp. 36, 37, 38



## The Symbol of the Sacred (Holy) Grail in African Traditional Art



**Picture:** Ritual bowl, Fulani people, Senegal.

Credit: Tim Campbell



**Picture:** Ritual bowl, Fulani people, Mali, western Sudan.

Credit: Lester Wunderman, 1977

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

[www.metmuseum.org](http://www.metmuseum.org)



**Picture:** Igbo door panel, Nigeria.  
Courtesy: Hamill Gallery Boston MA © 2013



**Picture:** Egungun costume; Yoruba people, Nigeria.  
Courtesy: Hamill Gallery Boston MA © 2013

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